

A NEW SERIAL STORY COMMENCES IN THIS NUMBER.

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1824.—VOL. LXXI.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING APRIL 16, 1893.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



LOOKING UP, VERONICA SAW A TALL MAN WATCHING HER WITH AN AMUSED SMILE.

THE BRIDE OF AN HOUR.

—701—

CHAPTER I.

PEOPLE called Mrs. Leigh a devoted mother, and never seemed to think there could be two opinions on the subject. The graceful widow was a great favourite with everyone round about the little town of Waldon, where she lived, probably because she was clever enough to study their weaknesses and humour them accordingly.

"We have no money," Mrs. Leigh once said to her daughter, Veronica, "at least only enough to keep us from starving; so, if we are to get any pleasure out of life, it must come from other people. You will find, if you only rub your acquaintance the right way, they will be extremely useful to you."

"I had rather beg my bread," cried Veronica, passionately; "it is despicable to live by flatter- ing one's friends."

Mrs. Leigh looked at her coldly. There was

no one present, so it was not necessary to act up to her rôle of devoted mother, and she deter- mined, for once to give Veronica a piece of her mind. The girl had only just left the school (a charitable institution for the daughters of officers), where she had been ever since her father's death. In the holidays Mrs. Leigh had occasionally sus- pected her daughter of holding very different sentiments from her own, but she had not troubled her head much about it then; now it was high time Vera learned her lesson, once for all.

"Listen to me," she said, imperiously, "my income is just over a hundred a-year; barely enough to keep us in food; where do you sup- pose the pleasures and comforts of my life come from? Could I wear silks and satins; have drives in the summer, and be asked to every festivity going on in winter, if I depended on my own purse? People know I can't return their hospitality, but I make myself useful to them. I take dull guests off their hands; I amuse them when they feel depressed, I am always ready to

admire their houses, their *chifons*, and their children. It pays, Vera, or I should not be one of the most popular women in Waldon. It pays well, and you have only got to follow my ex- ample to be as great a success as your mother."

"I had rather die."

"You can't die until your time comes, unless you commit suicide, which is very wicked. Don't be absurd! I declare you are nearly as crotchety as your poor father."

The tears came into the girl's eyes. How dearly she had loved her gallant, soldier-father, how bitterly she had missed him no tongue could tell! But Veronica had some of her dead father's courage, and she faced her mother bravely.

"If you please, mamma, I should like to go away. I think I could find a situation as governess, or companion; and I had much rather earn my own living."

"You will do nothing of the kind," returned Mrs. Leigh, sharply. "Do you think I would let it be said I turned my orphan child out into

the world to earn her own bread! a likely thing!"

"But you don't really want me, mamma; and you have just said you can't afford to keep me!"

"I won't hear another word on the subject!" said Mrs. Leigh. "Here you are, and here you will stay until you marry. With your face and a little prudence, you ought to make an excellent match, and repay me for all my sacrifices."

It would have puzzled her to say what those sacrifices were. She left the room without one glance at her daughter, and so she did not see the shamed flood of crimson which dyed Veronica's face.

She was nearly nineteen, but she was as unworlily as a little child. She must surely have taken entirely after her dead father, for there was nothing of her mother in her nature. The idea that she was expected to marry for the sake of a home; to find a rich husband as soon as might be, was well-nigh intolerable to her.

For a few moments she sat lost in thought. Should she write to the Superior of the Orphanage and ask her assistance in procuring a situation? But, alas! she knew perfectly Miss Morton would not help her to oppose her mother. Owing to Mrs. Leigh's absence on the Continent Vera had been kept at the Orphanage a year longer than usual in return for her services with the younger inmates; and Mrs. Leigh, on her return, had called to thank the authorities and had expressly told Miss Morton she wanted Vera at home now. She looked to her to be her own companion and comfort. She was not rich, but by dint of economy she hoped her small income would suffice for both of them; and, with Vera's appearance, she was sure it was best to keep her at home and not expose her to the risk of entering the world alone. Miss Morton had been moved almost to tears by this speech, and had quoted Mrs. Leigh ever since as a most devoted mother. It was hardly likely that after this she would assist Vera to leave home.

There was a small glass over the chimney-piece, and Veronica Leigh glanced at her own reflection in it thoughtfully. She was beautiful, and she knew it; but she took no pleasure whatever in her beauty. She had a horrible sort of fear that her mother would use it as an instrument of gain. She was not suspicious, but she knew perfectly that if she had been a plain girl she would have been allowed to leave Waldon and accept the very first situation she could find. It was Mrs. Leigh's habit to turn everything she possessed into money or money's worth, and it was hardly likely Veronica's beauty would escape the general fate.

Everyone in Waldon declared the girl was not like her mother. Mrs. Leigh was small and misshapen, with fair hair, china blue eyes, and a complexion which had continued to keep its original pink and white in spite of her forty years. Veronica was more than a head taller than her mother, and altogether on a grander scale; her hair was a dusky brown, and it fell in natural waves and curls over her brow before it was swept back and coiled in a loose knot round her small head; her features were good, too, correctly classical, to please all tastes, but their regularity would have charmed a sculptor; her eyes were grey, large, luminous grey, fringed with black lashes, which only seemed to accentuate the fairness of her skin. Her schoolfellows had nicknamed her the "Princess," and the title suited her well.

She went upstairs presently and put on her things to go out. Mrs. Leigh detested long walks, but she encouraged them in her daughter as good for the health and complexion. Veronica never felt so free, so nearly happy as when she had started for a three or four miles' tramp. She always turned her steps away from the town with its one winding street and its little colonies of "gentle" houses, flanked by one or two mansions belonging to the *dile* of Waldon. Veronica liked to ramble over the downs at the back of their cottage, the yellow gorse and the purple heather pleased her far better than the shop-windows; and, besides, she was so sure not to meet anyone. For whether through perverseness or natural lack of taste

Veronica cared nothing for her mother's friends. If she objected to Mrs. Leigh's flatterers then, it hurt her pride still more to see them make use of the widow and treat her as a sort of humble companion.

Veronica had clambered up on to the top of the downs, and stretched herself on a peak from which she could look down and survey the beautiful prospect stretched before her. Waldon, itself, nestled at the foot of the downs, but Veronica's eyes went further, to where a few miles off the ocean could be seen, its waves looking like silver in the sunlight, the white sails of the moving fishing-boats giving a picturesque look of life to the scene.

"Yes," said the girl, speaking her thoughts aloud, involuntarily, "it is a lovely place, and one might be very happy here but for the people."

"You are young to pose as a misanthrope," said a voice near her, and, looking up, she saw a tall, middle-aged man watching her with an amused smile on his face.

Veronica was not shy, and though she disliked her mother's acquaintances she was not really unsocialable. She looked on the stranger as "quite old," putting him much on a level with the professors who visited the Orphanage, so she saw not the least harm in answering his remark.

"I am not a misanthrope in the least, only I can't like everyone."

The gentleman repressed his smile, he looked at the girl, and decided she was the loveliest creature he had ever seen, then he fell to wondering who she was and why he had not met her before; she was certainly interesting, and there could be no harm in continuing the conversation.

"I agree with you so far, that I think some of the people hereabouts are very dull and insufferably conceited."

"Yes," said Veronica, with a sigh of relief at hearing her own views expressed by another, "that's what I tell mamma, but she always says Waldon people are perfectly delightful."

"I have lived near Waldon all my life," said the gentleman, "though lately I have been away for a year or two. I wonder if I have met your mother; I expect so, unless she is quite a new-comer."

"Mother has lived at Waldon for nearly ten years," said Veronica, "at Clematis Cottage, that little house by the post-office."

Lord Ashdale stared at Vera in amazement.

"You cannot possibly be Mrs. Leigh's daughter."

"Yes. I don't wonder you are surprised," said Vera, naively. "Mamma always says I am not in the least like her."

"Not in the least," replied Lord Ashdale, as he recalled the lively widow, with the pretty timid air and silken voice, who had made such a determined set at him a few years before; "besides, I have known Mrs. Leigh ever since she came to Waldon, and I have often heard her speak of her 'little girl.' I should have expected you to be about ten by this time, Miss Leigh."

"Oh, I am nearly nineteen, but you see I have been very little at Waldon. I was educated at an orphanage, and we only had holidays once a year. It suited mamma better generally to take lodgings in London, and have me with her there than for me to come home."

Lord Ashdale understood perfectly; a thorough man of the world, he had read Mrs. Leigh like an open book. All these years she had been angling for a second husband, and posing as a very youthful widow. The presence of a tall daughter in her teens would not have assisted her to gain her end. When the girl's education was finished, and she had to come home, Mrs. Leigh now simply changed her aim. She would resign herself to perpetual widowhood, and go hunting for a son-in-law instead of a husband.

And it struck Lord Ashdale she would find the task easier. There could be no question of Veronica's beauty. Her manner was charming in its grace and simplicity. He remembered to have heard Mrs. Leigh's husband came of a good old family. Looking at her daughter he could well believe it.

"And so you don't like Waldon?" he said, gently, for he did not want to frighten her. "I wonder how it has offended you?"

"I like Waldon—it is the people."

"Ah, I forgot! Do you know, Miss Leigh, quite agree with you. Waldon is my native town, and I haven't a friend in the place."

"Mamma has dozens," said Veronica, naively. "She says I shall have, too, in time; but I don't think so."

"Neither do I," replied Lord Ashdale. "I am afraid you are too outspoken to please Waldon; but there I am I. Miss Leigh, don't you think you and I might make a compact of friendship, we both seem rather lonely?"

Veronica would not commit herself.

"I am hoping very much to get away from Waldon," she said, simply, "and then it won't matter my not having any friends here."

The Earl wondered if she hoped to leave it a bride. Was she as anxious for matrimony as her mother had been? He hardly thought so.

"I think you will have your wish," he said, gallantly.

"I am afraid it will be very difficult. I begged mamma only to-day to let me go away and earn my own living, but she would not hear of it."

"Of course not."

"But you said just now you thought I should have my wish."

"I misunderstood you," he answered, quickly. "I supposed you to be expecting an invitation from friends at a distance to visit them."

Veronica opened her eyes.

"I haven't a friend in the world," she said, frankly. "Why, I never had a letter in my life since my father died. Mamma used to write to the Superior of the Orphanage about my holidays. She never wrote to me, she said it was too much trouble."

"You need not regret letters, Miss Leigh, I have lots, and I hate the task of answering them."

"Ah, but you would not like to have none," said Veronica, simply; "at the Orphanage it hurt me somehow to feel that out of the two hundred girls I was the only one who never had a letter."

She had risen as she spoke, and now turned her face towards Waldon. Lord Ashdale did not intend to part from her so easily.

"We have had a pleasant little talk," he said, kindly, "at least, I have found it so. Miss Leigh, if we meet again will you try and look on me as a friend? I know something of loneliness myself, and so you see I understand."

He put out his hand. Vera just touched it with her slim fingers, then she sped away down the hill.

"A lovely child!" soliloquised the Earl, "and, of course, her mother is only waiting to sell her to the highest bidder. I wonder if she would think the coronet of Ashdale worthy to grace her daughter's beauty!"

And then he, too, went home.

CHAPTER II.

LEONARD DANE, twelfth Earl of Ashdale, was barely fifty, though he looked older; he had told Veronica all his life had been spent near Waldon, but this was a figure of speech. Ashdale Castle, his nominal home, was only three miles from the little town, but he was away often for months at a time, and when he met Veronica he had only just returned from a three years' absence abroad.

Matchmaking mothers had well-nigh despaired of Lord Ashdale, and, perhaps with the view of consoling themselves for their failure to win him for a son-in-law, began to whisper that he had been very wild in his youth, and was still not at all a desirable person to entrust with a young girl's happiness.

They were quite right in both statements. Leonard Dane was emphatically a bad man; he sacrificed every principle of right, every rule of conduct to his own pleasure. He had "amused" himself for years without caring who paid the

punalty, but his vices were such as had not left an open mark upon him.

He did not drink, or frequent bad company: he did not obtrude his little foibles upon his neighbours; the man was all the worse at heart, because he had retained his refinement of manner and a certain nameless fascination which won his way with people who would have shrunk from him in horror had they known half the turned-down pages of his life.

Just at present, Lord Ashdale was quite alone at the Castle. He had come down there to think out what had been a much vexed question with other people, though it had never troubled himself before. He was fifty next birthday; if he ever took a wife he must not delay the choice much longer. Should he forsake the gay Bohemian existence he had led for years; the flat at Paris, where he had entertained chorussingers, ballet-dancers, and many a beauty of the *demi monde*; should he forewear the pleasures which hitherto had made up his life and settle down into a staid, home-keeping, English nobleman with a wife, and (in the future) family?

Lord Ashdale had pondered that question anxiously for several hours, when he met Veronica Leigh; when he parted from her on the downs his mind was made up. Here was the wife to suit him; her beauty would reflect credit on his taste. She was so young that it would be easy to guide her. From her own admission there was little sympathy between her and her mother, so that she would not want Mrs. Leigh permanently domiciled at the Castle; then, too, she was "friendly, and did not care for local society, there would be no one to whisper little stories to her of her husband's past, or tell her he had not always been the Paladin she knew him as—yes, Lord Ashdale decided it would do admirably.

He thought nothing of the thirty years between them, of the girl's youth and innocence, and his own dark blotched past; or if he thought, he considered it the correct state of things.

He could give Vera a coronet, jewels fit for a princess, and a handsome fortune. What could she want more! Seeing it was not much that in exchange she brought youth and beauty, besides a pure, unshadowed soul.

Like many another man who has gone the pace himself, Lord Ashdale was most particular regarding his womankind. Nothing would have induced him to marry a society beauty, or even a girl who had seen something of the world. His future countess must be utterly innocent of all the wiles and artifices he knew so well.

"It will do very well," thought the Earl, as he went home. "Mrs. Leigh will be only too glad to give up Clematis Cottage and reside permanently in London if I make her an allowance. I shall have my wife to myself. There ought to be some pleasure in seeing her enjoyment of all that I can give her, of seeing the bewilderment which comes into those big, clear eyes when she realises what it means to be a peeress, with an indulgent husband possessing enormous wealth; but I must go to work cautiously. I don't want a hint of my intentions to get abroad until I have settled things with the child herself."

Ashdale Castle was the grandest house in that part of Westshire, and quite the show-place of the neighbourhood. Whatever the Earl's faults, he loved his home, and had never suffered neglect to touch it. Gambling and speculation were not among his deviations, so though he spent his gold lavishly and denied himself nothing he fancied, there had always been plenty of money to keep up the estate.

The woodman's axe was never heard in the plantations, the farms and cottages were in perfect repair; the park and gardens were kept up as carefully as though landscape-gardening had been the Earl's pet hobby, and within doors the same perfect order prevailed.

Ashdale Castle had, at any time in the last thirty years, been ready for its mistress.

No doubt this explained a little why the county condoned Lord Ashdale's follies. Had he ruined himself and let his property go to rack and ruin, had he raised money on his estate, neglected his tenants, and felled every tree the entail allowed him to cut down for timber, why then Westshire would have thought much worse

of him; but as it was, society winked at the sins not obtruded on its notice, and received the noble black sheep as rapturously as though his fleece had been white as snow. It is the way of the world, and by no means peculiar to Westshire after all.

It was lunch time when Lord Ashdale reached home, and a visitor had been waiting for him over an hour, one who had come by his own appointment too—Mr. Fox, who to his professional occupation as a lawyer in Waldon joined the duties of agent to the Ashdale property. He had managed the estate for over twenty years, doing his best alike for the Earl and the tenants. He was a man of innate honesty and real ability, and he contrived to have a real liking for Lord Ashdale, though he probably knew more to his discredit than anyone else in the county.

"I'm sure I am sorry to have kept you," said Lord Ashdale, with the courtesy which was his greatest charm. "The truth is, Fox, the appointment entirely slipped my memory. We'll have lunch now and get to business after. What glorious weather it is. The finest September I have known for years."

"And you are actually leaving the partridges unmolested in the covert?"

"I only got down two nights ago, and I haven't had time to write to any man. I dare say I shall have two or three shooting parties soon."

Mr. Fox noticed that the Earl was unusually silent all through lunch. It began to strike him that the business on hand might be more serious than he had anticipated. The lawyer was a man of sixty turned, clear-headed and shrewd as became his profession, but with a good deal of the milk of human kindness still left in his heart.

"Come along," said Lord Ashdale, "we'll have coffee and cigars in my den. I hate this room. Its very size oppresses me, and those venerable ancestors in their gilt frames always seem to pursue me with their eyes as though I had done them some dire injury."

"Probably if they could speak they would say that you had done so," was the unexpected rejoinder.

"Good gracious! Why?" exclaimed the Earl.

"I am tolerably familiar with the annals of your family," said the lawyer, "and I am quite sure you are the first Lord Ashdale who reached the age of forty without providing himself with an heir."

"Ah!" the Earl hesitated for a moment, then he asked sharply, "If I died to-morrow, Fox, what would become of the property?"

The lawyer stared at his noble client.

"Do you mean that you do not know?"

"I should prefer for you to answer my question."

Mr. Fox looked at the Earl keenly. His answering words seemed simple enough, but the emphasis he laid on the first of them was strange.

"If you leave neither son nor daughter, Lord Ashdale, the eldest son of your sister takes the property, and the title becomes extinct."

"There is no proof that Lucy left a son," said Lord Ashdale, tentatively.

"I am well assured that she left several children."

"But her husband was as poor as a church mouse. If she had left children he would certainly have made some claim on me on their behalf."

"He was a proud man," said Mr. Fox, gravely, "and he never forgave the way you treated his wife."

"Well," said Lord Ashdale, after a pause, "you would not speak so positively unless you were sure. You mean that if I leave no child Lucy's son comes in for everything."

"For the estate and its revenues. Not for your personal property."

Lord Ashdale played absently with his watch chain.

"I suppose you can keep a secret, Fox."

"I have kept a good many in my life, Lord Ashdale, including not a few of your own."

"Just so. Well, I am going to entrust you

with another. I intend to be married before the year is out."

The lawyer betrayed not the least surprise. He made no comment, but sat in expectant silence; a silence which annoyed the Earl.

"You might say something," he exclaimed, "instead of looking as if you were miles away and did not hear a word I said."

"I heard perfectly, my lord."

"Well, don't you think it a wise resolve? Why should a good old name become extinct? Why should the son of a beggarly curate inherit the Ashdale property? Come, Fox, for more than twenty years society has advised me to marry. You might applaud me for making up my mind at last!"

"I will applaud you when I hear the lady's name," was the guarded reply. "But perhaps you have not decided that yet!"

"I have. I settled the question with myself to-day. I will marry one woman and no other, upon God's earth!"

Mr. Fox looked up with an expression of genuine satisfaction.

"I am delighted to hear it, my lord! You know that more than once I have ventured to express the opinion that only one woman had a claim to be your wife!"

"Oh! there was contemptuous indifference in the tone, not unmix'd with anger; surely you are not thinking of that old story! That page in my life is closed for ever. I never wish to re-open it."

"Then, you mean that that—I must say it—much-wronged lady is not to be your wife!"

"My wife is chosen!" said Lord Ashdale, recovering his good temper. "And I want you to find out a few particulars for me, seeing that she is a near neighbour of yours."

Mr. Fox looked as if he thought his client mad.

"You cannot mean anyone who lives in Waldon! Why, I know every woman within ten miles, and I am sure I never saw one you would care to look at twice."

"Indeed! Have you ever been to Clematis Cottage, Fox?"

"No; but I know Mrs. Leigh well. A pretty, simpering, little doll she seems; but she is the sharpest hand at a bargain, and the most cunning person at getting her own way I ever met. She is a great favourite with some people in Waldon, because she knows how to toady to them; and I remember, about seven years ago, she made a desperate set at you; but I never thought you would be taken in by her—after all these years, too!"

"You are on a wrong scent, Fox. My divinity is not the widow, but her daughter."

"Veronica! But she is a mere child."

"She is nearly nineteen."

"And where can you have seen her? She goes nowhere. My wife, who has taken rather a fancy to the poor girl, says her mother makes her perfectly miserable, and that the widow leaves Veronica at home to do up her laces and fall-lals, while she goes to her soirées."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Lord Ashdale, coolly. "My mother-in-law-elect looks quite capable of it. But I shall soon change all that. Before the year is out Veronica Leigh will be Countess of Ashdale!"

"I am sorry to hear it."

"Very disagreeable of you. You ought to be thankful the poor little thing will escape from a life which, by your own showing, is a dreary one."

"But—you are old enough to be her father!"

"What of that?"

"And," went on the lawyer, slowly, "Veronica Leigh is not like other girls. It will want more than money and jewels to make her happy."

"Fox, you are a regular wet blanket," said Lord Ashdale. "Do you mean to inebriate my wife must be miserable!"

Mr. Fox answered the question by another.

"Is your mind quite made up, my lord? Will nothing induce you to consider that—"

Lord Ashdale interrupted him.

"Nothing. You can of course, refuse to help me in the matter, but as I expect Mrs. Leigh

will be only too glad to welcome me as a son-in-law, I can easily dispense with your assistance."

The lawyer was silent, he seemed to reflect; but he knew his man. Nothing that he could say, nothing that he could urge would turn Lord Ashdale from his purpose; this being so, there was nothing to gain by opposing the peer's wishes.

"I will do anything I can to help you," he said at last.

"First of all, of course, no rumour of my projected marriage must reach—Penge."

"No rumour will reach there through me," replied the other; "but you are a public character, and your engagement will naturally be chronicled in the papers."

"I intend my engagement to be of the briefest." A pause. "Your wife is intimate with Mrs. Leigh?"

"Not so intimate as formerly. I think years have opened her eyes a little."

"Is she intimate enough to ask a question or two respecting the late Mr. Leigh?"

"Captain Leigh," corrected Mr. Fox. "I can tell you about him. He was an officer in a cavalry regiment, and married his landlady's daughter. His father was so annoyed that he cut off his allowance, and as the young couple couldn't live on a captain's pay, he exchanged into a regiment ordered to India; the child was born there. They came home when she was seven years old, and poor Leigh died not long after. His father was a baronet, but he positively refused to see either the widow or child. He was Sir Horace Leigh, of Margrave Court; the reigning baronet is Veronica's uncle."

Lord Ashdale looked surprised.

"I used to know Mrs. Leigh pretty well at one time. I wonder she never mentioned the Baronet. She struck me as just the woman to boast of a titled relative."

"She doesn't," and Mr. Fox chuckled. "When Sir Lionel came in for the title she had been a widow just six months, and had newly arrived here. I don't suppose she had a single acquaintance in the place when her brother-in-law called on her. He said he had no opinion of Mrs. Leigh, and he utterly refused to have anything to do with her; but he objected to pose as the villain of the play. She was just the kind of woman to get up some story about being ill-used by her husband's family. He wished me to go to her and offer in his name an allowance of sixty pounds a year on condition that she never mentioned her connection with his family. The moment she informed anyone (even her own child) that her husband had been old Sir Horace's second son, or that she was in any way related to the Leighs of Margrave Court, the allowance was to cease."

"And she accepted it?"

"She cried a little, and said Sir Lionel was very hard-hearted; but in the end she accepted it, and I am bound to say she has kept to her bargain."

"She has. She told me once that neither her husband or herself had any near relations."

"I am afraid truth is a virtue unknown to your mother-in-law elect," said Mr. Fox.

"Well, you know Waldon society better than I do. How am I to obtain a formal introduction to Miss Leigh without going to Clematis Cottage?"

"Haven't you got as far as that yet?"

"I have seen her once, this morning, on the downs. I began to talk to her, and decided she was worthy to bear my mother's name. You owe it to Miss Leigh that I kept you waiting."

"My wife has a tea-party to-morrow," said Fox, slowly. "Veronica Leigh is coming, but not her mother. The widow is going to a select dinner, and turns up her nose at 'tea and music.' You might be calling to see me on business, and honour Mrs. Fox by looking in at her tea-party."

"The very thing. I want to see more of the girl before her mother gets an inkling of my wishes."

The lawyer nodded. He was very silent during the rest of his stay, and as he drove home to the old-fashioned red brick house in Waldon High-street, where he had home and office

beneath one roof, he thought a good deal of the confidence just reposed in him, and his aversion to the proposed marriage grew more and more aroused.

"If it had been any other girl the pomps and vanities which would come to her as his wife might have made up for it, but if Veronica Leigh once knows the true character of the man she has married it will go far to break her heart."

And yet Mr. Fox never thought of attempting to warn the girl. A man of the world, he knew perfectly that though avowedly in a free country, Veronica literally had no choice. If Lord Ashdale wanted to marry her, her mother would force her to accept him, or make her life so miserable that the poor child would be driven to run away.

"She hasn't a friend in the world who would dare to take her part against her mother, and if the alternative is her being a fugitive and trying to earn her bread, why, with her face, so many dangers would threaten her that I, for one, should be loth to expose her to them. No! things must take their course. My only hope is that Lord Ashdale may change his mind (which is not likely) on seeing more of Veronica, or that if the news of the engagement gets to Penge, that poor lady makes such a commotion that Mrs. Leigh, for very shame's sake, has to break off her daughter's marriage."

Waldon was great at tea parties, not afternoon kettledrums, but the real old-fashioned evening affairs, beginning with coffee and cakes as the guests arrived, and ending with a stand-up supper about ten. This sort of entertainment was called a *soirée*, and was still the most popular form of hospitality in the little town, though one or two of the richer matrons were trying hard to introduce small dinners in its place.

But as the *soirées* could include twenty to thirty guests, and the dinners only six or eight, it needed so many of the latter parties to work off debts of hospitality that the *soirée* had little to fear.

Veronica Leigh rather liked Mrs. Fox, or to put it more correctly, the lawyer's wife was more congenial to her than most people in Waldon. Then she was painfully conscious that her mother having in earlier years made good use of Mrs. Fox, was now neglecting her for more recent acquaintances, so Vera accepted the invitation for the *soirée* with positive cheerfulness, and put on the grey nun's veiling, which had been her best dress all the summer, without a pang at the thought it would probably be the plainest garb there.

Mrs. Leigh intended to add to her daughter's wardrobe when it was time for winter clothes, at present she excused all toilet deficiencies by saying that Vera was not "out." She meant to take her to the tennis ball in December, but till then she had not really entered society, and her dress did not signify.

But in spite of the lack of festive attire, Veronica Leigh was the loveliest girl at the *soirée*, and Mrs. Fox, when she had a few moments free from hospitable cares, found herself watching her young guest with a strange feeling of pity.

A thoughtful, well-read woman of middle age, the lawyer's wife possessed a clearer mind and a larger heart than many of her acquaintances; watching Vera, it came home to her suddenly that those sensitive lips, those dark, expressive eyes must belong to a girl with a great capacity for joy or sorrow. This was no commonplace, placid young woman, but a creature with deep, strong feelings, who must be intensely happy or utterly miserable.

You could not fancy Veronica Leigh filling up her life with fancy work, housekeeping, sewing, or amusement. She had a soul, a soul whose aspirations she could not stifle.

"You are not playing, my dear," Mrs. Fox said, kindly, when she discovered Vera had been left out of the round games, and was sitting quite alone near the piano, which the best amateur in Waldon had just left. "How is that?"

"I don't know any card games," said Vera, frankly, "so I told Miss Fox when she asked me, I had much rather listen to the music."

"Perhaps you play yourself?"

"Yes," said Vera, acknowledging her one accomplishment, and not saying modestly "a little," "but mamma says no one would care for my music because it is old-fashioned; they never taught us new songs at the Orphanage."

"You must let me hear you," said Mrs. Fox. "I like old songs the best."

Veronica sat down at once. She had no music, she struck a few opening chords, then she plunged into a dreamy accompaniment, and her clear, sweet voice arose in an old Scotch ballad, of which, perhaps, because of its pathetic story, no one ever seems to tire—"Auld Robin Gray."

Mr. Fox had reached the drawing-room door with his noble client when the first notes fell on his ear. They both paused to listen. Lord Ashdale was a great music lover, and not for worlds would he have disturbed the singer, though he had not recognised the voice.

"Who is it?" he asked his host as the last word died away. "I did not know you had such a genius in Waldon."

"Come and see," returned the lawyer.

They entered the room as Veronica left the music-stool amid a torrent of thanks. Mrs. Fox caught her husband's eye.

"Lord Ashdale has been with me in my den," was the lawyer's introduction, "and I told him, my dear, you would feel flattered if he would join your *soirée*."

Flattered! She knew rather more of his character than other people, but she was delighted. Was he not an English earl, the magnate of local society! What a triumph over the doctor's wife, who thought her little dinners so much grander than anything Mrs. Fox could muster. She would hear, of course, that Lord Ashdale had been at the *soirée*, and be ready to tear her hair. She had declined Mrs. Fox's invitation and fixed her dinner for the same night.

"I am so pleased to see you," said the lawyer's wife to Lord Ashdale. "I did not even know you were in the county."

"I came home two days ago," said the peer, smiling. "and this time," he added, significantly, "I have come to stay. I have been away so long. I feel quite a stranger in my native town. Will you introduce me to the young lady who has just sung?—she has a glorious voice."

Mrs. Fox granted his request. Veronica saw the tall stranger she had met in her morning's walk. She was not in the least awed by his title, it rather relieved her, indeed, as her mother could not possibly scold her for speaking to a chance stranger now that stranger proved to be the high and mighty Earl of Ashdale.

For the second time that day her slender fingers rested in his clasp. There was nothing to warn her of the misery that was to come to her through this man, of the terrible shadow he was to bring on her life, of the sorrow and heart-ache, the loneliness and disappointment which were to result from that introduction.

Mr. Fox, looking on, felt a strange, vague misgiving. He was a hard-headed man of the world, but he had daughters of his own and loved them well; it struck him now, with a strange feeling of reproach, that he would rather have seen one of his own girls in her grave than have suffered her to become Lord Ashdale's wife, and yet that was the fate which loomed before Veronica Leigh, and he had undertaken to help to accomplish the sacrifice.

(To be continued.)

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VIRGINIE'S SUITORS.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"VIRGINIE! Virginie! where are you!"

A fair head with short curls appeared over the balustrade, and a pair of dancing grey eyes looked at the speaker.

"What is it, Arnold! How excited you seem."

"Come down here; I've something to tell you."

The girl ran lightly downstairs, and catching her brother's arm drew him into a room.

"What is it? Is the state of the poll known? Have you been elected chairman of the Young Men's Conservative Association, or have you at last summoned courage to propose to Annie Cypson?"

Arnold Farren twisted one of the girl's small ears playfully.

"You are awfully wide of the mark, Virginie, and for your impudence concerning Miss Cypson I fancy I shall punish you by leaving you in a pleasing state of uncertainty. You would be dead of curiosity before two hours had passed."

"Not so fast, Mr. Farren," with mock respect. "I remember a certain young gentleman who lost his appetite, and mooned about the house like an antiquated stork, solely because he could not discover a nameless enchantress's cognomen. I remember, too, that he could not rest until he had closely questioned a mutual friend as to her antecedents; he displayed a vulgar curiosity."

"Will you be quiet," cried Arnold, laughing, despite his efforts to appear grave. "What a chatter-box it is! If Parliament were composed of women—"

"England would jog along very comfortably," interrupted the girl; "and now for your wonderful piece of news. I confess I'm dying to hear it."

"Madame Caro will hold a *séance* at the Guild-hall to-night."

"And you intend taking me to see and hear her! Oh! you dear old boy."

"I thought you would like it, and she doesn't often favour us with a visit. The performance takes place at eight precisely, and I have secured three seats."

"And why three? As I don't wear any modern monstrosity I can't occupy more than one chair," and she glanced down with pardonable pride at the straight folds of her graceful dress.

"You are a vain little puss," Arnold retorted, "and I believe if you dare you would set up your own style as a model of perfection, would even preach a crusade against those women who prefer to appear in public as camels."

"Of course I should," smiling in a superior way, "and all the men who are not 'maahers' would ally themselves with me. But who is to be our companion to-night?"

"Ross Averill. He is a friend of Cypson's, and not a bad sort of fellow. He is articled to old Symonds, who declares he will make him a first-class lawyer. I have asked him to drink tea with us, and then we will start together for the hall."

"Let me run away and beautify," cried Virginie, in feigned alarm and agitation; and dexterously wrenching herself from her brother's hold she went swiftly upstairs. When she reappeared she was looking most brilliant, her short fair curls clustered about her shapely head, her grey eyes were bright with pleasurable anticipation, and her smooth cheeks flushed carmine. She wore a ruby velvet dress, and over that an apron of cream, sprigged muslin, with ruby ribbons at the throat and waist; she looked so sweet and so pretty that Arnold said,—

"There isn't a girl in Nettleford can hold a candle to you."

"Thank you," dropping him a curtsy, "you are really a very decent brother."

A maid appeared and laid the cloth; then Virginie busied herself in arranging the crimson and white china, and placing tiny vases of flowers at regular spaces. When finished she surveyed her work with a little pardonable pride.

"I hope," she said, "Mr. Averill will be punctual; I should hate to be late for the performance."

She had scarcely finished speaking when the hall-bell rang, and Arnold when out to meet his friend. There was a sound of gay voices and laughter, then Arnold said,—

"Come in and be introduced to my sister."

As the two young men entered the room Virginie rose, the soft lamplight played about her slim young form and her bewitching face. She glanced curiously at the new-comer. He was tall, broad-shouldered, fair, with an honest face and bright blue eyes; and he blushed slightly as he underwent the ceremony of introduction.

But the girl soon placed him at his ease, and in an incredibly short time he was chatting as gaily and familiarly as if he had known her for years. She was so frank, so lively, and had such decided opinions, that she interested and pleased him; and he was sorry when she ran away to prepare for their walk.

"You did not tell me your sister was pretty, Farren."

"I don't care to overpraise my goods and chattels," laughed Arnold; "I savoured too much of the bombastic; but Virginie is certainly pretty. I almost wish she were not, for I am always being bothered by fellows for an introduction to her, and I can't very well warn them that she is already appropriated."

"Then Miss Farren is engaged!" Ross Averill asked, a note of disappointment in his voice.

"No, that is where lies my difficulty. Latimer haunts the house, and there is a sort of boy and girl attachment between them which I think is developing into a more serious feeling; but as yet he has not spoken, and it is scarcely likely I shall take the initiative."

At this moment Virginie returned, wearing a long brown jacket, bordered with fur, a large brown hat and feathers, and a cluster of scarlet berries at her throat.

Ross Averill thought she looked even more bewitching in her outdoor toilette than she had done at the tea-table. She drew on a pair of long, light gloves, and held out her wrists for Arnold to button them. Then she said,—

"Now, gentlemen, I am quite ready," and preceded them to the door.

All the way to the hall she chatted gaily and frankly, and Ross found himself replying to her raillery as though he had known her months instead of a couple of hours.

Reaching the hall, Arnold led the way to their seats, and placed his sister between himself and his friend. Virginie looked round with curious eyes; already the room was filling, and a number of the Nettleford wags were audibly criticising the arrangements of the platform.

A screen formed of crimson and orange curtains hid Madame Caro from the expectant audience; a grand piano was placed at one end, at which a tall, fair girl, dressed in mourning, presided ably.

The performance was announced to commence precisely at eight, but it was fully a quarter-past when there was a stir among the curtains, and then Madame Caro appeared.

She was a dark woman, whose age it was next to impossible to guess; of queenly presence, with a most superb figure and strange dark eyes. But her voice disappointed one, it was so small and thin, and occasionally she indulged in a too lavish use of the aspirate. She advanced to the front and announced that the first part of the evening would be devoted to tricks oflegerdemain; these did not amuse Virginie, who was anxious for the *féerie* to commence.

At last Madame Caro disappeared for a few minutes, and during the interval the audience chatted or kept time to the lively airs the pianiste played; then came a cry for order as

the mesmerist reappeared, perfectly dressed in black lace, with slashings of pale pink.

She began by calling fourteen men from the audience, several of whom went up with a jaunty air, and nodded carelessly to their friends as though to intimate they were able to withstand all Madame Caro's passes and signs.

"Do go up, Arnold," said Virginie; "Mr. Averill will take care of me."

"Not if I know it," he answered inelegantly. "I'm not going to make a fool of myself before all these people."

Virginie turned to Ross.

"I do so want to see a friend or acquaintance under Madame's influence. I wish to know if there is really any truth in this sort of thing. Won't you oblige me by going up?"

He did not wish to leave her side, but as he looked into the pretty face and bright eyes he could not refuse her request. He rose reluctantly.

"Oh, yes, I'll go up; but I shall disappoint you, for I'm not susceptible to anything of this kind."

He went in a leisurely way towards the platform, and, reaching it, was greeted by cries from his acquaintances,—

"Bravo, Averill! Plucky fellow!"

Madame Caro motioned all her subjects to the chairs ranged in a half circle; then she bade each one sit with his left hand upon his knee, and hold a little disc in the hollow of his right, at which he was to stare persistently.

Then she began to expound her art; and when a sufficient time had elapsed she turned to the first subject, and making a few passes about his temples and eyes, bade him look steadily into her own strange orbs.

Presently his lids began to droop, and at last were fast closed. Madame retreated a pace or two; then advanced.

"Now you are fast," she said, shrilly; "you cannot open your eyes without my permission. But I bid you wake."

She breathed on his lids and clapped her hands vigorously.

"Wake! wake!" she cried.

And the youth started, opened his eyes in astonishment, and looked so unutterably dazed and foolish that a roar of laughter went through the room.

Madame took one after another, falling with some, who were immediately sent back to their seats. But generally she was easily successful. At last she came to Ross.

"She has got a tough subject now," said Arnold. "He is the least impressionable fellow I know."

It really seemed as though Ross were invulnerable. For a long time he resisted Madame's utmost efforts, but at last his lids began to droop, and Virginie broke into a low laugh of amusement.

"How irresistibly comic he looks!" she said. "I shall always remember him in that attitude, with that vacant expression on his face."

Arnold felt a trifle annoyed. He had so wished she should like and esteem his friend, for, to tell the truth, he did not greatly admire Darcy Latimer, the handsome young curate, for whose sake so many Nettleford girls had developed a sudden piety. He doubted the man, and did his best in a quiet way to keep Virginie and her admirer apart.

Madame Caro next dismissed all her subjects but Averill and a young fellow named Robertson. Then the fun grew fast and furious for the audience.

She persuaded her victims that they were Christy Minstrels, and induced Ross to play the bones; whilst Robertson was given a couple of tin plates, which he clanged together. Next they sang songs, and danced in a most eccentric fashion. Then she called Ross to her, and with one hand clasped his, whilst with the other she made passes about his mouth, and made him smile; the smile soon developed into a grin, the grin into a loud guffaw. She then subjected Robertson to the same ordeal, and presently both of them were rolling and writhing with boisterous laughter to-and-fro across the platform.

She convinced them the weather was sultry. They instantly pulled off coats and vests, collars and ties, and availed themselves of the fans she provided. She declared the atmosphere had changed to intense cold. They rubbed their hands and stamped; they played imaginary games of snowballing; they slid down imaginary slides.

She then sent them to the remote end of the room for a couple of babies, which proved to be rag-dolls with black faces. They returned to the platform, and were prevailed upon to kiss them, feed them, hush them to sleep, and place them in boxes, which they fondly believed were cradles.

With this the entertainment closed, and at the ludicrous dismay Ross and Robertson showed on being recalled to their ordinary selves there was a loud and prolonged burst of merriment.

"Well, I'm blest!" said Ross, and rapidly putting on coat and vest, he sprang from the platform, and left the room in extreme confusion and disgust. Outside the hall he waited for the Farrens, and Virginia's eyes no sooner lit upon him than she broke into laughter—even her shoulders shook with her efforts to suppress her mirth.

"I'm afraid I have established myself for ever as a fool, in your esteem, Miss Farren," he said, ruefully; "but 'pride goeth before a fall,' and I was so sure of my own powers of resistance."

"You must forgive me," the girl answered, her voice still shaken with mirth; "I have never seen anything so funny. Oh! if you could know how you looked, and what dreadful capers you cut! There," as she saw an annoyed expression cross his face, "there, I promise to say no more on the subject; it is really too bad, as you put yourself under Madame Caro's hands at my special request. Let us forget all about the *science* for the time being, and you will please us both if you will take supper with us."

So they went in together, and Ross thought he had never enjoyed anything so greatly as that impromptu meal. It was very simple but elegant; and Ross, learning that all those dainty trifles had been made by Virginia's little hands, would have suffered agonies of indigestion rather than refuse one with which she piled him. When the cloth was removed Virginia rose at Arnold's request, and opening the piano began to sing one of Darcy Latimer's favourite songs, a saucy little ballad by Marzials, entitled "Just as well."

The clear, sweet, soprano rang through the pretty room, and now and again Virginia nodded her head, and smiled coquettishly at Arnold to emphasize her words. When it was ended she wheeled round upon the stool, and after receiving Ross Averill's thanks and praise with greatest sang-froid, said,—

"Now, Mr. Averill, you will perhaps follow suit; Arnold doesn't sing."

"Neither do I," Ross answered, wishing for the moment he had been born a Sims Reeves or an Edward Lloyd.

"Oh, fie!" Virginia cried, holding up a finger reproachfully; "how can you tell me so wilful a falsehood after to-night's performance? Believe me your rendering of that extremely sentimental ballad about telling folks your father's a marquis, whilst in reality he is 'knight of the father,' entitles you to a prominent position as a vocalist."

"You are too cruel, Miss Farren; you are very well aware I don't know A sharp from E flat, and that I couldn't sing an air to save my life. I'm an awful duffer, really."

She shook her head till the pretty, short curls tumbled about her face, and she peered through them at him with laughing eyes.

"I shall believe only that you are lazy, and unwilling to satisfy me. You think I have encroached too long and too much already upon your kindness."

"Indeed, no," he said, quickly and earnestly. "I am only too glad to obey your pray, believe that, so far as I can, I will serve you willingly."

"Thank you," the girl answered, lightly and carelessly, "you are very good;" and she did not guess how, in the days which lay before her,

this man would be her support, her truest friend.

Just now she held him in somewhat slight esteem. He seemed to her but an ordinary young man, and she could think of him only as he posed on the platform—Madame Caro's puppet. Inwardly she contrasted him with Darcy Latimer, the handsome, High Church curate, whose voice was capable of all passionate or tender inflections, whose violet eyes had looked love into hers, whose delicate, almost womanly hand had clasped hers close and fast, until the blood had mantled her fair cheek, and her heart had throbbled most uncomfortably against her side. There was no man like him in Nettlefold (or elsewhere) according to her belief.

When Ross Averill had taken his leave that night Arnold turned to Virginia, and laid his hands upon her shoulders.

"Well, little woman, and what is your opinion of Averill?"

Virginia stayed to fasten the ribbon at her throat before she made any reply, then she said critically,—

"There isn't very much in him; but, as you say, he is not a bad sort of fellow, is virtuous, and all that, in a negative way."

"That is sorry praise; I hoped you would like him immensely."

"I'm not prepared to like any man immensely at such short notice," said Miss Farren, with a light laugh, and kissing her brother she ran lightly upstairs to her room.

Mr. Farren, Virginia's father, had been an accountant, and saved sufficient money to leave his daughter an annuity which would keep her from want. His son took his business after his decease, and whilst his mother lived did his best to console her in her grievous affliction.

But Mrs. Farren survived her husband for a few months only, and then Arnold constituted himself Virginia's guardian, and was to her as father and brother.

They remained in the old house, and on leaving school the girl took the reins of domestic government in her hands, and used them wisely and well.

CHAPTER II.

It was Sunday morning, and Virginia walked with her brother to St. Stephen's Church. She had a leaning towards what the Nettlefold people called "Puseyism," and as Arnold never denied her anything he let her have her own will in this thing, and usually accompanied her to the morning services.

On their way they were overtaken by Ross Averill, who said he, too, was going to church. It is true that he had not thought of such a thing until he saw Virginia and his eyes fell upon her tiny boots; but he had been longing for a sight of her since that night he met her first, more than a week ago, and this seemed an excellent opportunity.

Together they entered the church, and he took his place beside her. The organist was playing a droning air, and there was such a rustling of silks, an overpowering rush of many perfumes, that Ross glanced a trifle disgustedly at Arnold, who maintained an impenetrable gravity.

Then came the sound of many feet, and the congregation rose as the black-cassocked, white surpliced choristers passed down the aisle. Behind them came the curate; the sun shone down upon his handsome face and auburn hair, and more than one maiden's heart fluttered as the hem of his "man-millinery" touched her own robes.

The service began, and Ross was fain to confess the intoning was perfect, that Darcy Latimer read the lessons with great expression, and that his elocution was splendid. But he distrusted the man at once, although all he had heard of him, since his arrival in Nettlefold, was to Latimer's credit.

At last the sermon commenced. It was short, but to the point, and the language used was that of a poet. He stirred his hearers' hearts to a wonderful pitch of excitement without making

any apparent effort; he used few gestures, but Ross thought savagely that he would have displayed his right hand less freely had it not been so white, so beautifully formed, and adorned by so magnificent a ring.

He was glad when the service ended, and he was walking again with Virginia through the quiet streets.

"Well," said Arnold, as they neared home, "what do you think of Latimer?"

Without any thought of what Farren had once told him about Virginia and the curate he answered,—

"He reminds me irresistibly of Tennyson's 'snowy-banded, delicate-handed, dilettante priest.' There is nothing real in the man."

Virginia looked up with a flush on her face and an angry light in her eyes,—

"I did not think your acquaintance with the Laureate so intimate," she said, and there was a note of disdain in her fresh young voice.

"You apparently believe me a stupid and ignorant fellow!" Ross answered, with such good-humour that the girl was ashamed of her rudeness.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Averill, but one does not like to hear old friends ridiculed or maligned. I am sorry Mr. Latimer does not impress you favourably, as he is the closest and most ancient friend we have, and you will probably meet him at ours."

"I will endeavour to conquer my prejudices, which very possibly has no good foundation!"

"And you have forgiven me my petulance!" she asked, with a smile.

"I could forgive you a far greater offence than that, Miss Farren; and I really deserved your rebuke. I spoke so unadvisedly."

But for all his apparent lightheartedness, when he left Virginia he was ill at ease. He recalled the curate's fair, handsome face, remembered every line and feature, and determined the mouth was weak, the eyes too close, and not sufficiently steady in their regard.

"The man is false!" he said, angrily, "and she thinks kindly thoughts of him, perhaps loves him; and if he treats her ill she will break her heart over him!"

He repeated her name again and again to himself in a monotonous way, then he said,—

"I will see as little of her as possible; already she is growing too dear to me for my own peace of mind!"

The next day, as he sat in the office, a young man he knew slightly entered, and requested to see Mr. Symonds. On learning he was out, the visitor seated himself on a stool and began to talk of passing events, and, finally, of the Nettlefold belles.

"There's Auntie Cympeon. They say Farren has a sneaking kindness for her, and she is as pretty and sensible a girl as any man could desire to call wife; but, bless you, beside Virginia Farren she is commonplace! There's such a unique style about that girl, and she dresses to perfection! By the way, I saw you with the Farrens at St. Stephen's yesterday."

"Yes, I know the brother well, Miss Farren but slightly."

"Latimer haunts their place, and folks say it is to be a match, but I don't believe it. Our worthy curate won't marry Virginia Farren, and I'm ready to bet a pony on it!"

Ross looked up with interest.

"Why won't Latimer marry the young lady?"

"Because he is daudedly poor; and although he preaches eloquently against 'filthy lucre,' and pretends to despise it, he is only a mortal like ourselves, and I believe is looking out for the best chance of settlement. You see Virginia has no influence with the bishop, and only an annuity of ninety pounds, which is strictly tied up."

"And you think Latimer would place these considerations in the balance against her personal attractions?"

"I'm sure of it. I hate the man with his mellow voice and violet eyes—his dandy air, his bowings and scrapings. If he is in a room no other fellow has any chance with the girls, and a clerical lady-killer is the most despicable of

creatures. I'm afraid Virginia Farren will have to yield ground to Kitty Godfrey and her hundreds!"

"And who is Kitty Godfrey?" asked Rose, feeling sure at heart for Virginia.

"Gemin! don't you know! Well, you are behind the times. She's old Godfrey's daughter. He was a dealer in Brummagem wares, out of which he made his fortune. Two years ago he bought a place three miles out of Nettleford; they call it The Chalet, it being modelled after a Swiss cottage, and Miss Kitty rules the old man with a high hand. She is a dashing girl, a trifle loud, but good-hearted; not pretty, but healthy and bright, and helress to eleven hundred a-year. But don't mention anything I have said to Farren. Of course, the rumour concerning the lady and our estimable curate may have no foundation; and I should not like to do any man an injustice, or make Miss Farren unhappy," saying which, the young fellow went his way, leaving Rose to ponder over his words.

He tried to forget them, but could not; they lingered with him through that day, and for many days to come, until he grew wretched for Virginia's sake.

He saw very much of her at that time, and he could but confess to himself that he had learned to love her as he had thought never to love.

He met Latimer at the pretty quaint old house, and tried honestly to like him but failed, and between the two men there was an unspoken hostility, which Virginia was quick to see, and she hardened her heart against poor Rose.

There was a small but extremely pretty garden at the back of the house, which it was the girl's pride and joy to tend; and there one evening, when he entered, Rose saw her standing with the curate engaged in tying up primroses, for it was April.

With a bow to Virginia, he went into the house and joined Arnold. He was strangely restless and ill at ease, and begged his friend to walk out with him.

"I feel stupid," he said; "a spin along a country road will brighten my faculties."

They went out together, Arnold stopping in the garden to tell Virginia he should not be late, and to invite Latimer to join himself and Rose in the walk. The curate said,—

"Thanks, many; but I intend going home in a little while, as I have an immensity of work to get through to-night. You see the parish is a large one, and I have so little help," with a deprecating gesture; "my leisure time is infinitesimal."

"I wish," said Arnold, as they bent their steps in the direction of a neighbouring village, "I wish I knew what to think of Latimer. I'm half-inclined to doubt his sincerity; and if I caught him playing fast and loose with Virginia I'd take such revenge on him that no other girl should ever suffer through him."

"And I too," said Rose, in a low, hard tone that compelled his companion to regard him earnestly. Then he put out his hand,—

"Averill, I am awfully sorry; indeed I am. I would far rather see her your wife than his."

"Don't speak of it; I was a fool to set my heart upon her. I might have known she was not for me—she was so pretty and dainty, I so clumsy and blundering in words and ways. Tell me what she says of me!"

"She very rarely speaks of you; and in describing you to any friend she uses the words I once used with regard to you: 'He is not a bad sort of fellow.'"

"She thinks of me with contemptuous liking. I wish to Heaven Madame Caro had been at Jericho before she made such an utter idiot of me. Virginia will always remember me as she saw me there—and will despise me."

Then they spoke of other things, and Rose was all unconscious as they walked Darcy Latimer was telling the old old story under the plum tree in the little garden. For some time he and Virginia had been very silent; the girl had lost her usual sang froid and was somewhat pale; her fingers toyed nervously with the primroses she wore in her bosom, and her lids were

down-dropped. Before her stood Latimer, as if were drinking in every detail of her beauty; in his violet eyes there was a look which told all his secret, and under the silky, fair moustache his lips were tremulous. After a long pause he stretched out his hand to Virginia and drew her nearer. The pale light of the moon fell athwart her face and seemed but to enhance its tender loveliness; his heart beat hot within him, and, forgetful of all he had intended to remember, he caught her to his breast,—

"My love, my life; my darling Virginia."

She did not resist his embrace, rather she clung to him, half-laughing, half-crying, all in a happy flutter to know herself so dearly loved; he lifted her face between his hands and kissed her passionately.

"I'm a poor fellow at best for you to throw your heart upon," he said, with sudden self-deprecation. "My only merit is that I love you. You must take me just as I am, dear love, 'with all my imperfections on my head,' and try to make the very best of a bad bargain."

She leaned back her head, and looked into his face with such glad and innocent eyes that he, knowing what treason he had once entertained towards her, could not meet her gaze.

"My dear, my dear," she said, in a whisper, "I will not have you speak evil of yourself, for now you belong to me; and listen, Darcy, bend your head very low, and do not look at me. I have loved you first and last, and I believe in all England there is no man so good, so true, as he who has given me his heart."

He knew he was unworthy of her; he did not deserve her praise or her trust, but he drew her closer still and whispered,—

"Kiss me, sweet." She lifted her pure lips to his, and kissed him once slowly and solemnly as though she were taking a great vow—and in her heart she was swearing fealty to him through all the years of life that should be granted her.

"Are you happy?" he said, gently, and she smiled up at him,—

"Oh! Darcy, I am so happy, that I am half inclined to fear my joy may be taken from me."

"Why should you fear? Nothing but death can part us now."

"Nothing but death," she echoed, but there was no shadow on her sweet young face, no terror in her heart. "We are both so young and so strong," she continued, "and we shall never fall each other."

"Never, my darling, so long as we have life and breath."

And she was content; no dream of future anguish came to darken that glad hour, no doubt of the fair, handsome, vacillating man cast a gloom upon her love—she was simply and perfectly happy.

The parting between them was prolonged, but at last it was over, and Virginia ran up to her room to think over all Darcy had said and looked.

She saw her own reflection in her mirror; the pretty, curling hair, the perfect contour of cheek and chin, the dainty bloom that seemed to intensify the brilliancy of her eyes; then she dropped on her knees before the window, and said, in a low voice,—

"Oh, thank Heaven for my prettiness! Without it, perhaps, I should not have won him."

In the morning, when she met her brother, she laid her soft cheek against his shoulder.

"Arnold, dear, did you wonder that I did not sit up for you last night?"

"Yes, at first; but I remembered you were walking all the afternoon and supposed you were tired. I was rather disappointed, as Averill came in for some music."

She seemed scarcely to hear what he said; she hid her face from him, and said, in an embarrassed tone,—

"Mr. Latimer is coming to see you this evening."

He put his hand beneath her chin and forced her to look at him.

"Is it about you, Virginia?"

And she nodded.

Arnold stooped and kissed her.

"I hope he may prove worthy of you," he said,

and refrained from saying more lest he should wound her tender heart. But he sighed as he went to his office.

"I wish it had been Averill—any one rather than Latimer."

At noon he met Rose, and, as gently as he could, imparted his news to him. He did not look at him as he spoke, and when he had finished he waited in silence for the other's comment. But none came, only his hand was gripped in an almost cruel grasp, and the next moment Rose was striding away from him down the long and narrow street.

He reached the office and found it empty; he sank into a chair, and dropped his face upon his hands.

"It's all over with me," he gasped, "Virginia! Virginia! had you but loved me! Oh, my dear, my dear! how I would have served you, how I would have worshipped you!"

But he was strong and resolute, not the sort of man to lament over the inevitable, so presently he rose and applied himself to copying old and musty deeds; and if her face came between him and the parchment, and her dear eyes smiled bewilderingly up at him, he made no sign.

At night he went down to the house where he had met his fate. Arnold was closeted with Latimer, but Virginia was walking to-and-fro to-and-fro in the pleasant garden, fragrant now with the scent of early flowers.

She turned with a smile to greet him, and he saw a wonderful change on her face, a softer, tenderer expression, and in her eyes a deep gladness that smote him to the heart.

"Virginia," he said, and at his unwonted familiarity and the mournful cadence in his voice, she started and regarded him keenly; "Virginia, Arnold has told me all, and with my whole heart I wish you joy. I had hoped once to stand in Latimer's place, to be to you what he is; that is all over now, and I would not have you grieve about it. I am a strong man, capable of bracing much, and I shall not trouble you with my complaints. I think I only tell you what you are to me, so that should trouble come to you, in which help and comfort can be given, you may rely on me for both. You have made me better and braver; you have taught me many good things, and with all my heart I thank you."

She laid her little hand in his, it was cold and trembling.

"I am very, very sorry," she said, gently; "I did not guess you—you loved me. But why do you speak of trouble in the first hours of my joy? You fill me with a vague fear of the future."

"Do not let my words alarm you, believe they are but the outcome of my pain."

"Tell me," she entreated, wistfully, "does any blame attach to me? Have I been too careless of your feelings? Have I been unduly warm?"

"No," he answered, gently; "you have been just your own frank, friendly self. The fault has been all my own, and I am rightly punished for my presumption."

"Oh, do not call it by so hard a name! Every woman is honoured by the regard of a true and honest man. I wish—oh! I wish that things had happened otherwise. I shall hate to remember I have made you suffer!"

"Then do not remember it," he said, with a faint smile. "Rest assured I shall never recall this hour to you; I shall live my life as before, and shall learn contentment in my work. I am not so weak that a single blow should make me helpless or afraid."

He started as he heard Darcy Latimer's voice sounding from the hall.

"I may see Virginia now!"

"Yes; you will find her in the garden," answered Arnold; then, catching sight of a man's form, he called, "Is that you, Averill? Come in; I want you a few moments."

Rose took Virginia's hand in his.

"Good-night, my dear," he said. "May all blessings, all happiness be yours!"

He passed Latimer with a bow, and joined Arnold in the hall. The latter led the way to the room where Rose had first met Virginia, and, pointing him to a chair, said,—

"You know what Latimer came for to-night,

but you don't know that I was half-tempted to send him packing, only I could not bear to make Virgine unhappy, to see her bright little face clouded, and her eyes sad. I could not endure to estrange her heart from me, so I have given my consent to the engagement, and have even promised it shall not be publicly announced for a time."

"What!" cried Ross, in indignant surprise. "Is he ashamed to acknowledge it? Farren, I hate deceit or concealment of any kind, and I feel you will live to regret your concession. May I know what reason he alleges for desiring secrecy?"

"He says that he hates long engagements, and, having nothing but his curacy to subsist upon, he cannot afford to marry for some years to come, unless, indeed, he wins promotion. He states that a certain man who has the gift of a living has shown a decided penchant for him, and promised as soon as it falls vacant to induct him. But he would withdraw his patronage should his favourite marry unsuitably; and probably he would regard the sister of an accountant as beneath the dignity of a cleric."

Ross started up in a white heat.

"The fellow is a humbug, and you have allowed him to carry the day with his confounded sophistries! Of course I have no right to speak of or interfere with the matter; but, for all that, I wish with all my heart you had been harder with him, for Virgine's sake. Both you and she will live to regret this day!"

"You are a Job's comforter!" said Arnold, ruefully. "I felt I was an idiot as soon as Latimer left me, but I did not want you to confirm that feeling; and you know I shall look sharply after my sister's interests."

"Yes, that is all you can do under the circumstances. You can tell her I will keep her secret inviolate; but if Darcy Latimer plays her falsely let him look to himself, for I would stick at nothing that might avenge her wrongs. Now I'm going. I'm poor company for anyone to-night. Good-bye, old boy, and let us try to hope for the best."

So he went; and Virgine, seeing that tall, stalwart figure taking its lonely way, felt grieved for his sake.

"Poor Mr. Averill!" she said, gently and half-unconsciously.

Darcy bent to kiss her, remarking, jealously,—
"He should have no share in your remembrance; even your thoughts are mine now."

CHAPTER III.

MAY came and went, and Virgine Farren was supremely happy. She saw her lover every day, and whatever distrust Arnold had of him he carefully disguised it from her.

Sometimes, too, Ross spent a pleasant evening with them, but that was rarely, as Darcy Latimer had developed an extreme jealousy of him, and seeing this Ross wisely held aloof.

One summer afternoon Virgine walked with her lover through some meadows adjoining Nettlefold; they spoke of many things, and Darcy, forgetting all anxieties, gave himself up wholly to the pleasure her society afforded him.

Now and again the girl paused to gather wild roses, or the plentiful blossoms at her feet, and Darcy laughingly rallied her on her love for such simple flowers. She made some playful rejoinder, lifting her eyes to his, and the great love shining there made him forgetful of all else. He caught her to his heart and kissed her dainty lips, whilst she tried to affect a displeased expression.

Suddenly a loud bellowing broke the sweet silence, and hurriedly glancing round they saw a huge brown bull rushing towards them. Virgine grew white and sick with fear; her heart beat so that it was audible even to Darcy, her trembling limbs refused to move.

"Darcy," she moaned, "save me. Oh! my love, my love, save me!"

"Run!" he cried, hoarsely, scarcely less white than she. "Take my hand; we are near the stile."

"I cannot move," and she put up her hands and covered her eyes.

A great horror came upon the man; it was such a terrible death to die, and life was so sweet to him, it held such goodly things in the future. He turned and fled, leaving Virgine behind. He leapt the stile and knew that he was safe, but he dared not look back for her.

He cast himself face downwards on the grass, shivering with sick dread of what he felt must come.

The whole affair occupied but a moment; then he heard shoutings in the distance, and a breaking of twigs and boughs close by. He looked up and saw a stalwart figure crashing through the hedge and recognised it as Averill's, and crossing the meadow in an opposite direction were the farmer and his men supplied with ropes.

Quick as lightning Ross made his way to the terror-stricken girl, and catching her in his arms started for the stile.

"Virgine, love!" he whispered, and then he felt the hot breath of the infuriated animal about his neck and ears. With a desperate effort he flung Virgine over the stile; it was too late to cross himself. He turned and faced the enemy. There was no escape, but his brave heart never faltered; he caught the bull by the horns and hung on with the same courage that had distinguished him throughout.

Perhaps help would reach him in time; he was swayed hither and thither, his arms seemed wrenched from their sockets. His brain reeled, his senses grew faint, his hold relaxed; then a wild cry broke from the farmer as the bull tossed Ross high in the air, and before he could be lassoed he had trampled on his fallen victim.

When Virgine dared to look she saw two men leading the beast away, whilst the others bent over a prostrate form and tried to staunch the blood flowing from his side.

Darcy had risen and now approached her.

"Don't touch me," she said, hoarsely; "don't speak to me. He is dying for my sake!" She crossed the stile and went hurriedly towards the group. "Oh!" she cried, wringing her hands, piteously, "tell me he is not dead! I cannot bear he should die for me!" She flung herself upon her knees beside him, and spoke his name. She turned imploringly to the farmer. "Run for help," she said, "he must not lie here."

Then Darcy spoke.

"I will go," and a labourer answered, contemptuously,—

"It's about all ye're fit for, Maister Parson. Ye can show a mighty clean pair o' legs from what I seed of yer."

He felt very miserable as he met the scornful look of the men around, and Virgine would neither speak to or glance at him.

"Cut away," said the farmer, gruffly, "you ran fast enough a little while ago. If you don't care for the task one of my men will go."

"Tell me where I shall find a medical man!" Darcy asked, helplessly.

"Cross those two meadows, and you're in the village. First white house you come to is Mr. Gautrey's—he's the surgeon. Tell him to go on to Oaklands; we shall be there before him," and then, as Darcy hurried away, the men began to construct a rude litter of boughs, over which they spread their coats; then they gently lifted Ross, and laid him down upon the impromptu couch, and began to march steadily with their burden towards the farmer's house.

Virgine caught the good man's arm.

"Let me go with you," she said, a catch in her breath; "let me nurse him. It was for me he sacrificed himself."

"You know him!" questioned Mr. Allen, bluntly, but not unkindly.

"Yes, he is my brother's friend—Mr. Ross Averill. I am Virgine Farren."

"Then, Miss Farren, you'd best come with me to Oaklands. My wife will give all the care and attention she can to Mr. Averill, but she has so many duties to perform, and there are no daughters in the house. She will be glad of your assistance."

So Virgine walked with the dismal procession. One man had hurried forward to prepare Mrs. Allen for her guests, and she received them in the porch.

"Dear, dear!" she said, sympathetically, "he does look bad. Poor soul! Jemima, you must kill that horrid brute. Come in, miss. I have got the bed ready for the gentleman—is he your sweetheart?"

"No, but my very dear friend, and he has saved my life at the risk of his own," and the tears rose to her pretty eyes; but Mrs. Allen said, quickly,—

"Come, come, dearie, if you're going to cry you'll be no use in a sick-room. Bless you, he'll get over it—he's such a strong, hale, young fellow. Gently, my men, carry him as carefully as you can," and she followed them upstairs, motioning to Virgine to stay below.

Presently Mr. Gautrey arrived, and the girl was left alone with Darcy, who had driven up with him. She had moved to the far end of the room, and was apparently deeply absorbed in some curious prints. The curate moved towards her.

"Virgine," he said, imploringly.

She confronted him with such scorn on her face, such repulsion in her eyes, that he shrank from her.

"Don't come near me," she said, gaspingly. "I don't think I could bear you to touch me. You have disappointed me so miserably. I thought you so brave, so noble; I did not believe you could desert me in my need. I know I was cowardly, but had you striven you could have saved me without such risk as he ran. You had time, and—and you thought only of yourself."

"I stayed by you until I was in jeopardy. I entreated you to take my hand, and seek safety in flight. I could do no more. I have not the physical strength which is, or was, Averill's greatest boast," and there he glanced deprecatingly from her to his slender, effeminate hands, "neither do I profess to have much presence of mind. A man may fall once, and yet not be a coward. I have read an instance of one—"

"Hush!" said Virgine, sharply interrupting him. "Your defence is worse than the offence. I cannot listen to you now—perhaps to-morrow I shall be calmer. Go now to my brother; tell him that whilst Mr. Averill needs me I shall stay here to nurse him."

"You will not do that," swiftly. "I shall not permit it. Do you suppose I will allow you to compromise yourself with him so far! Surely your lover has the first claim upon you!"

"As our engagement is not publicly known it can make small difference to you whether I go or stay, and surely you have some small sense of gratitude; or perhaps you value my life so lightly, that you think thanks unnecessary to the man who saved it."

"You know you are wronging me, Virgine! you know that I love you beyond everything. Words are too poor to tell all that you are to me."

She still looked disdainful; but he drew nearer, and essayed to kiss her.

"No," she said, stepping back, "not now; my heart is very bitter against you," so he went away very miserably. Then Mrs. Allen summoned Virgine to the sick-room. The surgeon turned and regarded her with interest; took note of the pale, sweet face, the clear, steady grey eyes, and said, mentally,—

"She will do."

He gave her numerous instructions, and then went, promising to call again in a few hours, and spoke hopefully of Ross's recovery, although he was far from sanguine on that point.

At last Virgine was alone with her lover; he lay there so fearfully white and still, that she sometimes thought him dead. She laid her fair head upon the pillow beside his, and wept long and silently.

Her tears seemed to ease the burden of her heart, and at last she could think calmly of what had passed; then she began to excuse Darcy to herself, because she loved him, and a woman's love is not easily killed.

When he came in the evening she met him quietly, but with a certain sense of restraint, because she could not quite forget his cowardly desertion; but the curate was master of all the

arts of persuasion; and now he had had sufficient time to collect his scattered faculties he brought all his eloquence to bear upon Virginia, until at last, with a little sob, she flung her arms about his neck, and kissed and forgave him.

Only deep down in her heart there would stir an uneasy recollection of the morning's events; never to be forgotten, never to be glossed over.

Her idol swayed on his pedestal, and at a second blow would fall heavily and be dashed to pieces.

Day after day Virginia sat by Ross, tending him so carefully that Mr. Gautrey complimented her on her carefulness and skill, and at last one morning his blue eyes opened wide and conscious upon her, and one wasted hand was outstretched to touch her.

"I thought I was dreaming," he said, faintly. "Why are you here, Virginia?"

"I stayed to nurse you," she answered, softly. "Don't you remember what happened to you in the meadow? Don't try to think if it hurts your head."

"I remember now," he murmured. "Were you hurt at all? Why are you so pale?"

"I have been so anxious about you," she answered, evasively. "At one time we thought you would die, but last night Mr. Gautrey declared you out of danger. The people here have been very kind and good, both to you and to me. Arnold comes every night to inquire of you. He has been so harassed, poor fellow! and the Nettlefordians have vied with each other in remembrances of you. They have sent gifts of flowers and fruits, even books, forgetting they were useless to you. You have lain unconscious so long."

Then she knelt down beside the bed, so that her face was on a level with his.

"Listen to me," she whispered; "I have not thanked you yet for your heroic act. I have not told you how, night and day, I pray I may be able to recompense you in some way for all the misery, all the pain, you have suffered for my sake. Tell me how best to serve you, how best to thank you."

"By drying those tears, and being your old happy self," he said, gently.

She took his wasted hand and pressed her lips to it; she tried to smile in obedience to his wish, but, failing that, rose and ran from the room, and did not return until she had grown calm again.

It was early in July before Ross could leave his bed, and be advanced towards perfect health by very slow stages; and through all the long, hot days, the tender, starlit evenings, Virginia sat by his side; and if she sometimes wearied for a scamper across the meadows, a ramble through the lovely lanes, she showed this neither by word or look.

Her lover came and went, but there was an element of constraint in their intercourse. Darcy felt that, although she loved him as fondly as ever, she did not idolise him as once she had done, and to be worshipped and admired had grown necessary to his happiness.

At Nettleford, too, he held a lower place in the regard of the men, who did not scruple to call him a poltroon, and sundry other very uncomplimentary names.

He vented all his displeasure on Virginia, who bore with his whims and jealousies patiently, uncomplainingly, and strove always to excuse him even to her own heart.

By tacit consent she and Ross never spoke of Darcy. Sometimes the young man was oblivious of his rival's existence, so supremely happy was he in Virginia's society.

She read to him, sang to him, talked of such things as she knew interested him, and unconsciously riveted the fetters that bound him, making escape impossible to him.

In a starlit hour, when they sat side by side in Mrs. Allen's parlour, he suddenly leaned forward and clasped her hand in his, that each day grew firmer and stronger.

"Virginia," he said, hoarsely, "this cannot go on much longer. I am getting back my strength rapidly, and soon we must return to our separate existence. It will be better so; far, far better. I am afraid of myself. My love cries out within me, and soon will cry aloud to you for

something sweeter and dearer than pity! I want to behave honourably to Latimer, and to give you no offence, but, my dear, my dear, I am only mortal!"

She sank down upon the floor, and hid her face upon his knee.

"Oh!" she said, "what an unhappy girl I am to inflict so much misery upon your true and tender heart! You have given me life, and I take away your joy! You have given me love, and in exchange I can offer but my friendship! Oh! forgive me! forgive me!" and then she sobbed bitterly.

His hand stole gently over her fair, short curls.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, "I will not have you grieve thus over what is the result of my folly, my presumption. Look up, little one. I will not have these tears, and Latimer will be here soon."

She passed her hand hastily across her eyes, remembering Darcy hated anything sad, either in sight or sound; but her sweet lips were tremulous, and her nervous hands plucked at the flowers in her bosom until their pink petals fell in showers upon the carpet.

"If I thought you could pardon me the wrong I have unconsciously done you, if I believed you would forget me, I should be happy."

It was on his lips to answer he should never forget her so long as life and memory lasted, but he restrained himself. Why should he add to her pain?

He leaned over her, and even in that dim light she saw how noble his face was in its unselfish love and manly tenderness.

"Dear heart," he said, "would it hurt you greatly, would it wrong him deeply, to give me one kiss?"

Without a word she lifted her lips to his, and he kissed her, not passionately, but in a brotherly fashion. Then he said,—

"Get up, my dear, I think I hear Latimer's voice outside."

She rose slowly and almost wearily.

"I wish," she murmured, "I could teach you to hate me! You would be happier then."

She walked into an adjoining room, where Darcy waited her.

"Where is Arnold?" she asked, when the first greetings were over.

"You're earliest thoughts are his, your earliest questions of him," Darcy remarked, jealously, and drew his arm from about her waist.

"I cannot help being anxious about him," she said, deprecatingly. "He must be very lonely without me, and I'm sure the house is in a dreadful muddle; servants never do their duty when the mistress is absent."

"Oh, Arnold is happy enough; he spends the greater portion of his time at the Cypresses; and I wish you would not talk so much of domestic affairs—it isn't good form. And if Arnold is lonely what am I?"

"Poor Darcy!" winding her arms about his neck, "how heartless you must think me. But you must remember Arnold has never been used to a house not governed by women, and when he comes home at noon or at night, when he sits down to his lonely meals, I know just how wistfully he looks at my vacant place, and wishes I were with him."

"Then why don't you go home?" he demanded, roughly.

"I will next week. Mr. Gautrey says Mr. Averill may be moved then, and he will need me no longer. My dear, don't be angry with me; could I leave the man who saved my life alone among strangers, sick almost to death?"

"You exaggerate a very ordinary act into heroism," Darcy retorted.

The bright blush mantled her cheek.

"However ordinary an act it was, but one of the two men present was capable of performing it," she said, and then, seeing the frown upon his brow, did her best to soothe him into good humour, and succeeded tolerably well.

At parting she lifted her dainty face to his.

"Darcy," she whispered, "will you come earlier to-morrow, lunch with us and take me for a long walk afterwards?"

He changed colour, but in the little porch it was too dark for her to see that.

"I am very sorry," he said, stroking her hair, and stooping to kiss her mouth, "but I have an important engagement—not in the way of pleasure—so I cannot come. But the next day your will shall be my law."

He tenderly embraced her, and she did not guess it was the last time their lips should ever meet.

CHAPTER IV.

As he passed down the sweet-scented, old-fashioned garden her voice broke into song. He paused at the gate to listen, and the words floated out to him. The ballad she had chosen was that most pathetic of modern songs, "Our last walk." His heart beat fast as he listened; he leaned his face upon the little gate, and groaned aloud in the bitterness of his spirit. Hark! what were her words now? She had come to the closing stanza, and the wretched man wrung his hands and cursed the fate he had done his best to hew out for himself. Listen! was there any music like her voice?

"The music is fading and dies, whilst we dreaming stand,

There are tears in your pitying eyes, as I hold your hand.

Oh! love, for the last time, whisper low,
Say you love me, darling, once before I go,
Only to-night, only to-night, list to the sweet refrain,
Only to-night, only to-night, but never for me again."

"Virginia!" he groaned, "my love, my wife! how can I let you go?"

He stretched out longing hands, he breathed her name in tenderest tone, but she neither came nor heard, and the night closed around him.

He began to walk slowly towards Nettleford; love and ambition tore at his heart, his deep embarrassments were very present with him, and he muttered,—

"There is no help for me; but oh! how shall I break it to her, my queen, my Virginia! I think I could bear anything for her sake save exposure—that would ruin me for ever. No, I can't endure contempt or poverty; and yet, and yet how shall I live my life without her?"

That night his landlady wondered what had ruffled the curate's unusually mild temper.

"Poor dear!" she said, "it's some o' them aggravating committee-men have been upsetting him. They don't understand him or valley him at his proper worth," and she imported her opinion to her husband, who remarked with a grunt,—

"I don't like such milk-and-water sort of chaps, and I often think Parson Latimer ain't any better than his neighbours."

Such profanity shocked the worthy soul, but she might have had less faith in her handsome lodger could she have heard his words and seen his expression as he sat over his breakfast the next morning.

Beside his plate were a number of blue envelopes, at which he shook his fist threateningly.

"They're beginning to dun me," he said, savagely, "and I can't risk exposure. Confound them! they know that as well as I. There is only one way out of the difficulty, and that is to marry Kitty Godfrey. She is ready to fall into my arms, I know, and the old man too would be glad to have a gentleman for his son-in-law."

Then he thought of Virginia, and his face grew dark. There was a short and sharp struggle in his heart; and, self-interest, not love, won the day.

"Poor little soul!" he murmured, "what will she say! Well, I will not tell her to-night; I must have one happy hour before we part for ever; then I will write her all the truth. What will Farren do? He is sure to hold his tongue for Virginia's sake. It is a lucky thing our engagement was never made public."

A short while after he rose and dressed carefully; then started for The Châlet. Miss Godfrey was ready, and waiting before the door was

a handsome equipage drawn by two magnificent bays.

"You have come at last," she said, giving him her hand. "Don't wait to see papa now; we are late already, and folks say the fancy fair is to be the event of the year."

He took his seat beside her. A servant accompanied them, but Miss Godfrey drove, and she handled the reins with such dexterity that Darcy complimented her upon her skill.

They went in the direction of Huntley, a town four miles distant, where a fancy fair was to be held that day.

And this was the engagement Darcy had pleaded as an excuse for not seeing Virginia until night—the engagement not "in the way of pleasure."

Miss Godfrey laughed and chatted gaily the whole way, but Darcy was silent and distrustful. When she rallied him upon his evident uneasiness he sighed, and said, "Perhaps one day he would tell her what trouble oppressed him, but he would put off the evil hour so long as he could, lest fate should be against him," and the young lady smiled and blushed, thinking that she was the cause of his anxiety, and wishing that he were a trifle less timid.

Reaching the field she dismounted the carriage, and entered, leaning on Darcy's arm, radiant in her happiness and undisguised love. Folks turned and looked curiously after them. Some shook their heads sagaciously, others wondered that the fastidious Latimer should choose such a girl to wife as Kitty Godfrey. She was a healthy, happy-looking lass, but without refinement of voice or appearance. "But then," they added, cutely, "she is an heiress, and money covers a multitude of sins."

That morning Ross had risen so much stronger, so much lighter of heart, that he had proposed Farmer Allen should drive himself and Virginia to the Huntley fancy fair; and as all the hay was gathered in the farmer readily agreed.

They arrived on the field a short while before Kitty and Darcy, and Ross took his companion to the tents at once, saying they would inspect them before they were overcrowded.

He was still looking pale and ill, and many a girl there, who knew his story, regarded him with kindly interest; but he had eyes only for Virginia.

After seeing all there was to be seen he proposed finding a seat beneath the trees, and Virginia readily agreed, for the day was hot and the field crowded, and it would be pleasant in the shade, listening to the band.

Two or three girls and some young fellows stood close by, but evidently did not see them.

"So," said one, very audibly, "you think the curate is fairly caught at last?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure of it. Why he has visited Virginia Farren every evening since she went to nurse young Averill. I expect the engagement will soon be announced."

"You're quite on the wrong scent," said one of the young men. "It is Miss Godfrey who possesses the greatest charm for him. By jingo! here they come. She really isn't a bad-looking girl; he might do worse!"

Ross turned to glance at his companion; she was ghastly, but she tried to smile up at him. Then he followed the direction of her eyes, and saw Darcy advancing towards them.

He passed them by, not seeing either, for he was smiling into Kitty's face. Ross rose, took one step forward, but Virginia held him back.

"For my sake! I beg, pleaded, 'for my sake!'" and he sat down beside her again.

The gossip moved on, and they were alone to all intents and purposes.

"Virginia," he said, huskily, with a passionate desire to comfort her, "don't judge by appearance, they are so often deceitful!"

She did not catch his suggestion as he hoped she would.

"No," she whispered, "he is false to me; I feel it in my heart! Take me away from this dreadful place, the music maddens me!"

She put her hand to her head and strove to smile, but failed wretchedly.

"Take me away!" she said again. "Hide

me from all the cruel eyes! Quick—quick, or I shall break down!"

He drew her hand in his arm, and began to hurry her through the gay crowd.

"Don't let him see me," she panted. "Don't let him learn how he has hurt me—how deeply I am wounded! Spare me that, Ross!"

She had never before used his Christian name, and he started. It sounded so strange, uttered by her voice.

"Virginia," he began, and then paused.

This was not the time to speak of love to her, when she was writhing under the keen, fresh knowledge of Latimer's treachery, and yet his heart ached to tell her all the tale—to catch her to him and comfort her, even as a mother comforts her wounded child. In some way he got her to the gates; there was a small boy in sight, and Ross halted him.

"Run on to 'The Crown' and ask for Mr. Allen; tell him to put in the horse at once, because Miss Farren is ill, and desirous to get home. Can you remember? Say, too, we are coming on slowly."

The slight of sixpence lent wings to the grob's heels, and he had soon disappeared into a neighbouring street. Virginia clung to her companion's arm.

"Don't tell them what has happened," she panted. "Don't let them guess what a blind fool I have been! Oh!" she added, in low, passionate tones, "what a dupe I have been! How he and she must mock at me!"

"My dear, my dear," he said, with gentle remonstrance, "control yourself. You look so strange, so agitated, I am afraid you will attract attention. Bear up a little longer yet. For your own sake you would have no one know what has occurred!"

In an instant she held herself erect, and although her face was ghastly, and her eyes wild with unwept woe, she was apparently calm.

But her hand tightened on his arm with so close a grasp as to be almost cruel. In silence they reached "The Crown," where Mr. Allen stood by his horse's head, quite ready to drive them back to Oaklands. He exclaimed, anxiously, when he saw Virginia's white face.

"Dear, dear, Miss Farren, how queer you look! I'm afraid the heat has proved too much for you. Well, say I, there is nothing like a quiet life."

"You are right," she answered, allowing Ross to assist her into her place; "I shall be glad to reach home."

The farmer yielded his seat to Ross, who was not too engrossed with the reins to notice his companion. All through the drive she sat with fixed, immobile face, and saddest, weariest eyes; her hands tightly clasped.

She looked out on the lovely world around, but saw nothing; and the man who loved her so truly feared that her life was, indeed, marred for ever—that she would never again be the happy Virginia, light of her brother's home, pride of his heart; that her "whole life's love" had, indeed, gone "down in a day."

When they reached the house Mrs. Allen ran out to meet them.

"Why," she cried, "I didn't expect you for hours! Miss Virginia, child, what has happened? Why, you look like a ghost!"

"I am ill," she answered; "let me rest for a moment, and then—I will go home."

"Home! Why, child, you must be mad! You're not fit to go farther, and if you're sick who is to attend you? I shall hear no more nonsense of that kind," and she drew the girl's head down on her motherly bosom.

"I must go—indeed I must!" Virginia cried, hysterically; "if you mean to be really kind you will not stay me. I want to be at home and alone."

Ross poured her out a glass of wine, and compelled her to drink it.

"If you really wish to return to Nettleford I will drive you there, but I am afraid you will alarm Arnold."

"No, no, he will understand. I can't stay here—I can't stay here!"

Then she turned to Mrs. Allen.

"I do not wish to wound you, for you have

been very good to me; I will come here again when—I am stronger and better, and I shall always be proud and glad to welcome you to Nettleford—you and the boys and Mr. Allen."

"We shall all miss you sorely," said the good woman; "you have been the very light of the house, and if Heaven had been pleased to give me a daughter I should have prayed she might resemble you."

"You are very good to say so. Will you kiss me good-bye?"

"My dear child, yes; and if Mr. Latimer comes to-night what shall I say to him!"

"That I have gone home on account of my ill-health, but do not say I was at the fancy fair to-day; he does not approve such frivolities, and one is bound to please one's curate," with a little, hard laugh.

Then she was assisted into the trap, and Ross drove her into Nettleford, Mr. Allen accompanying them. As they bowled along the quiet streets a few people turned to glance curiously after them, remarking that Miss Farren was looking awfully ill, and to speculate a little upon which of her two suitors she would finally accept.

At last they reached the house, with its gables, its vines, and magnificent magnolia. Virginia sprang out, not pausing for any assistance, and hurried up the little garden.

At the hall door Arnold waited her; she ran up to him, threw her arms about his neck, hid her face upon his bosom, and sobbed.

"I have come back to you at last, and I shall never leave you any more. Oh, my dear, my dear! be good to me now, for my heart is broken!"

"Ross!" he cried, "what has happened?" And the other answered between his shut teeth.

"Ask Latimer; he can tell you best. Take her in; for Heaven's sake let no one know what has happened to her!"

In silence Arnold led her into a room; Ross paused on the threshold a moment, then, turning, left the house.

"I will return to settle with and thank you for your goodness to-morrow," he said, shaking Mr. Allen's honest hand heartily. "I can't leave Nettleford until I know Miss Farren has recovered her indisposition. You see she has been most generous to me."

"She has, indeed," retorted the farmer; "I shouldn't wonder if you cut the person out yet. I hope you may; he's a poor thing at best."

He drove off, and Ross walked slowly up the street to his own lodgings, remembering Virginia's white, grief-stricken face. He could not hope that Mr. Allen's words might prove true; his heart was very heavy, but less with grief for himself than for her. Must she, the love of his life, live through weary days alone and in sorrow? Must he always be powerless to help her? And should the man who had so wronged her go unpunished?

In the quiet room sat brother and sister; she had flung herself into his arms, and he clasped her close while she told the story—so short, but so full of anguish to her, so black with Latimer's treachery.

"Oh!" she sobbed, "I shall never be glad any more, and I am so young. Life lies all before me, and even now at the outset my heart has failed me. Oh! comfort me, strengthen me, I am so very weak."

He clenched his hands, and vowed in his heart that he would avenge her wrongs; but he told her nothing of his thoughts, lest he should add to her grief. So they sat together far into the night, he speaking comforting words, she with her head upon his shoulder, too spent now to weep or lament longer. At last she rose.

"I am going to bed," she said, drearily, "good-night, my dear, and Heaven bless you for your patient goodness." She paused then as if fearing to say more; her lip quivered and her hands were tremulous. With one farewell look she went out and upstairs to her room.

She locked the door, and sank in a heap upon the carpet, resting her elbows upon her knees, and her chin in her hollowed palms. Many bitter thoughts came to her then—tormenting memo-

ries of tender words she had spoken, passionate caresses she had lavished on the unworthy object of her love, and her cheeks burned with a shameful flush.

"What a poor blind fool I have been!" she thought, dismayed; "and yet, and yet, perhaps it should be some consolation to me to know that Darcy loved me once, perhaps loves me now. Yet can I ever recover my lost esteem when I remember I have stooped so low as to give him all my heart, all my will! Oh, whichever way I turn there is no ray of light, no least hope. Why could I not listen to Arnold, and give my love where it would have been safe from shipwreck, without fear of this terrible ending! Darcy! Darcy! how could you be so false to me! How could you so wantonly spoil all my life—not a month, not a year, or even many years, but all the time to come!"

She laid her weary head upon her arms.

"How glad I was this morning, how wretched now. I almost doubt my own identity."

Then again, as the level moonbeams emote her bowed form,—

"He must never know how I suffer, he must never guess. Will he come to-morrow? Oh! breaking suddenly down, "how shall I meet him—what greeting shall I give him? My heart, my heart! Oh! my broken, bleeding heart!"

How slowly the minutes and hours wore by! but morning came at last—morning with its sunshine and scents, its sparkling dew, its mingled melodies. She lifted herself wearily, and after bathing her face and smoothing her hair, went down to play her part, to fill the long day with old accustomed duties.

CHAPTER V.

It seemed to Darcy Latimer that summer day would never end; he almost hated Kitty for her innocent joy and obvious love. When she spoke he contrasted her loud, ringing tones with Virginia's gentle, musical voice. He inwardly regarded her attire with disgust, although, indeed, the costume was a pretty one, and if worn with grace would have appeared elegant. When she lifted her sparkling black eyes to his he stigmatised them as bold, and remembered a pair of truthful grey ones, which only last night had looked love into his.

He hated the rapid talk that went on around, the curious glances of acquaintances; and the music maddened him, for always it fitted itself to one name—and that name was Virginia.

But he told himself there was no help for it. He was too poor to marry where he chose, and life without his little luxuries would not be worth living.

A small house, shabby clothes. Bah! he could not endure the prospect even in imagination; so farewell Virginia, and, with Virginia, farewell love! But all things must have an end, and at five o'clock the aristocratic visitors began to leave the fancy fair; perhaps the philanthropic feeling prevailed that there would be more room for their humbler brethren.

Outside the gate Miss Godfrey's bays were pawing the ground impatiently, and the servant was drowsily reading a paper, the reins loosely held over his arm. Kitty gave him a sharp reprimand, which seemed to make very small impression upon him, but Darcy winced under her tone and words.

"Heaven! what a scold she will be!" and then he took his place beside her, a smile on his lips, and a tender light in his false eyes.

Reaching the Châtel she jumped out, and turning to him said, eagerly,—

"Of course you will dine with us, Mr. Latimer!" and he answered he should be most happy.

Mr. Godfrey received him cordially, but Darcy fretted inwardly over the old man's lack of polish, and vowed to himself that when he and Kitty were married her father should not dine with them save when *en famille*.

Kitty herself ran away to dress, and if he had not been prejudiced even Latimer must have confessed she looked extremely well when she

returned. She wore pure white that evening, with a cluster of scarlet verbenas at her bosom, and another cluster in her hair; and her expression was gentler than he had ever seen it.

She presided at table with a grace he had scarcely expected in her; and he thought, with a throb of triumph, even his patron must approve his choice when he learned the lady's fortune, and saw how capable she was of holding her own against high-born dames.

After dinner Mr. Godfrey proposed they should go at once to the drawing-room.

"I ain't a stickler for etiquette," he said, in his blunt, hearty fashion, "and I never did believe in fellows sitting over their wine until they don't know what they're about. I shouldn't be the man I am if I had. Hard work and honesty, Mr. Latimer, with a little spice of shrewdness, are the things by which a man makes his pile. Come and hear my girl sing."

That was the last thing Darcy wished, but he could not say so, and he followed his host into the drawing-room.

Kitty was very fond of Italian and Swiss songs, with their trills and quavers, but she very wisely refrained from inflicting either upon the curate, who was reported to be a wonderful musical critic. She sang old-world ballads, both Scotch and English, and hoped in her poor, foolish little heart that she pleased her auditor. She would have been considerably startled could she have read his thoughts as he listened.

"Voice, abominable, style execrable. Oh! Virginia, my little, lost darling!"

Later on Mr. Godfrey fell asleep, and then Darcy began "to improve the shining hours"; he moved his chair nearer to Kitty, and took gentle possession of the hands that were wandering aimlessly over the piano keys.

"Kitty," he said, tenderly, and then paused, sick at the thought of what lay before him; but the girl, unconscious of what was passing in his mind, turned her bright and blushing face upon him a moment; then her eyes fell before his, and she began to tremble.

He was weak and vain enough to feel flattered, and he stole his arm about her waist, whispering,—

"Kitty, do you love me well enough to marry me? I am a poor man, but I have good prospects that will not be good to me unless you share them."

There was a falseto in his voice, but Kitty was deaf to it; she bowed her head upon his shoulder, whilst her hands stole about his neck,—

"Oh," she said, a thrill of happiness in her voice, "you know I love you. I wish I were cleverer and prettier for your sake," and then, as in duty bound, he stooped and kissed her, whilst all his heart cried for Virginia, and her face rose before him to reproach him with his treachery.

The minutes wore by; he sat still by Kitty, she listened to the whispers of his so well-simulated love, she resigned herself wholly to his embracing arms, and believed herself the happiest of all girls.

Mr. Godfrey woke with a start, rubbed his eyes, then exclaimed,—

"Oh, oh! I guessed as much for all your alms, Miss Kitty. Young man, I suppose you want to marry my daughter!"

"That is my intention, sir; provided you will give your consent."

"And what if I say no?" remarked Mr. Godfrey, with a chuckle.

"Why, sir, you will make two hearts unhappy, and spoil two lives."

"Dear me," with a dry look, "in my young days the answer would have been after this fashion,—

"I'll have the girl with or without your consent."

"I should be sorry," said Darcy, with his clerical dignity coming to the fore, "I should be very sorry to incite any girl to rebellion against her parents."

"Tut, tut!" interrupted his host. "Just forget your calling a few moments, young fellow, and let's talk together as man and man. Come here, my girl."

Kitty rose and went towards him; he drew her down upon his knee, and looked at her with fond, proud eyes, a little dimmed with pain at the thought that now she was not wholly his.

"Do you love Mr. Latimer, my dear?" he asked, with grave and anxious questioning.

She hid her face upon his shoulder and whispered,—

"Yes."

"And you are willing to leave me for him?"

"Not leave you, my dear!" she answered, clinging to him. "Our home will be yours, father. Isn't my heart big enough for two loves?"

He kissed her tenderly, then he glanced keenly at Darcy.

"Latimer, I never said my lass 'no' in all my days; so now as you wish it, and she wishes it, I consent to your marriage. And you won't think it amiss if I say I would rather she had chosen some good, hard-working tradesman, who need never have been ashamed of her father. She won't come to you empty-handed, and I guess that'll be a good thing for you, as curates aren't paid too liberal as a rule. Shake hands."

Darcy offered his small, delicate hand to his future father-in-law, who gave it so heartily a grip that the curate winced; then Mr. Godfrey gently pushed Kitty towards him.

"Be good to her," he said, huskily. "She's all I've got," and left them alone.

All in the silver moonlight Darcy walked towards Nettleford, a successful but most unhappy man. How should he break the news to Virginia! That was the question which racked his brain and tortured his heart. How would she receive the tidings of his treachery! What words would she use! What words that could be cruel enough for his crime! He would see her the next day, have his last happy hours with her, and then he would go home and write her how he had sinned against her. He could not tell her; he could not bear the anguish and scorn he felt would gather in her lovely eyes. He dared not watch her face slowly blanching, nor listen to her short, sharp cry of pain.

He could not sleep that night, but lay tossing on his bed, unconscious that in her little chamber Virginia watched through the long and silent hours, and cried upon his name in accents of keenest reproach.

He was glad when morning came; he dressed carefully and went down to breakfast, to be informed that Miss Farren had returned the previous day, looking "mortal bad."

Still with no inkling of coming discomfiture, he started at ten to perform the morning service; and even his greatest admirers were fain to confess that Darcy Latimer performed his duty in a very slovenly way. The more romantic feared he was ill, and cast about in their minds what remedies to recommend or forward to him.

Casting aside casock and surplice, with an ill-disguised impatience, he made his way towards Virginia's home. He was at once admitted by the old servant, who went up to her mistress to announce his arrival. He wondered why Virginia kept him so long waiting. Did she not desire this meeting as intensely as he?

He could not guess how she pined in her chamber until she had gathered all her courage for the conflict, and could face him with the calmness born of despair. He did not see her wild eyes, or hear the swift prayer: "Oh! give me strength!" He waited in happy ignorance for her coming.

At last he heard the soft sweep of her skirts outside, and then the door opened and Virginia entered—not as he had pictured her, but proud and calm, and stern; not his Virginia now, or in any time to come. With a sinking heart he went towards her.

"My darling little sweetheart, what is it! Are you ill?" he asked, and tried to touch her, but she waved him back.

"Mr. Latimer," she said, without any preface, "allow me to say I know all your dastardly conduct towards myself. I was at the Huntley fancy fair yesterday; you passed me by with a girl upon your arm. I have learned she is Miss Godfrey, and that you are posing as her suitor. For the indignity you have inflicted upon me I



WITH A DESPERATE EFFORT ROSS LIFTED VIRGINIE OVER THE STILE, IT WAS TOO LATE TO CROSS HIMSELF.

will never forgive you. Hush, sir, hear me to the end; from to-day we are strangers. I will say nothing that might injure you with your new love, I will take no revenge; but let me confess there is no woman I pity more sincerely than the woman who will be your wife. There is your ring—I regret that I ever wore it; here are all your gifts," and she drew a small packet from her pocket. "I wish I could return all your vows, and all your feigned cares with them."

"Virginie," he pleaded, "don't be too hard with me; I am the wretchedest fellow in existence. I love you, upon my word I do; you are more to me than any other woman will ever be; but I am a poor man, so I cannot choose my wife as I would. Love, love! say one kind word to me!"

Then the passionate scorn in the great, grey eyes and about the proud mouth held him silent.

"You aggravate your offence," she said, icily; "it is useless now to stay here longer. Had you not best go?"

He moved to the door; there he paused, and stretched out entreating hands to her.

"You have forgotten the packet," she remarked, quietly, and placed it in his hands. "I shall thank Heaven each day I live that I am a poor girl, otherwise my fortune might have made me the victim of an unscrupulous, unprincipled man. Go!"

And he went out like a whipped cur, conscious that her scornful eyes followed him to the last.

Then she sank into a chair and sobbed as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER VI.

It was Saturday, and evening service was over. The young ladies of the parish did not assemble in the churchyard as had been their habit since their fascinating curate's induction,

for somehow the news of his engagement had come out.

Still, a few lingered behind, unwilling or unable to dethrone their idol so utterly, and at such short notice.

The street was full of workmen and their wives going to do their marketing; a few boys were playing in the road, and the whole place was astir with life.

The curate loitered in the vestry, thinking that after all it was not so pleasant to be an engaged man, as it robbed him of the open worship of his fair parishioners.

As he trifled with band and stole, and put his collar right, gave a final tug at his monstache, a stern-faced man strode down the street, whip in hand. His lips were set in a straight, hard line; his brows frowned ominously; and those who met him wondered what ailed Ross Averill; that to all their greetings he returned only a nod, or a brusque good-evening.

The vestry door opened, and the curate came out. The waiting damsels fluttered, and pretended not to see him until he stood in their very midst; then each and all gave a little start and faint cry of astonishment.

Darcy Latimer chatted easily and airily for a few moments, and then lifting his hat moved from the porch.

Outside the gate Ross waited, whip in hand. In an instant the two men were face to face—the one stern and avenging, the other smiling and bland.

Before Latimer could guess what was his errand Ross inserted his hand in the collar of his coat.

"You scoundrel!" he ground out between his teeth, "I swore I'd punish you, and by Jove I will!"

The heavy whip fell about Darcy's back and shoulders. He rolled and writhed, shrieked, and threatened, and implored.

The girls fled the spot in confusion and dismay; the boys ceased their play, and formed in a ring about the two men, whooping and laugh-

ing with that cruel delight in another's castigation which is one of their chief characteristics; men and women paused to look on; whilst the curate shielded his head with his arms, and all but fell to the ground.

"The man is drunk," said a woman in the crowd. "For pity's sake take poor Mr. Latimer away; he'll be killed."

"Fair play's a jewel," remarked the man she had addressed; "let 'em fight it out. It strikes me the parson chap is a great coward."

So no one interfered to stay Averill's arm. Sick at last with disgust at his self-appointed task and the cowardice Latimer displayed, he flung the writhing, moaning wretch from him.

"Pah!" he said, under his breath, then paused to wipe his brow. "Get up before I am tempted to go further!" and without another word he strode through the crowd, not looking to right or left, and went his way to his lodgings.

Bruised and aching in every limb Darcy Latimer rose slowly to his feet, a shout of derisive laughter greeted him, and a small mob of boys and men followed him to his home, gathering in numbers as it passed through the various streets.

What a pitiable wretch he looked!—his clothes all soiled, his hat crushed, his face white with pain and recent terror! His landlady exclaimed in a horrified way when she saw him, and, drawing him hastily into the hall, closed the door, and questioned breathlessly what had happened.

"Don't ask me!" he groaned, "but give me something to relieve me! I—I believe I shall faint!"

She poured out some brandy, and bade him drink it; then she assisted him upstairs, wondering not a little what accident had befallen him.

(Continued on page 15.)

MOONSHINE has been found to have a marked effect on stammering. People so afflicted stammer most at full moon.



JACK BURN RUSHED INTO THE ROOM, AND LOOKED DOWN ON HIS OLD SHIPMATE.

THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER.

—10:—

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Mrs CLARE did not see the end of the "cataclysm" she had caused, greatly to her disgust. Instead of her young charge coming to her all tears, grief, and penitence, and throwing herself into her arms and making her her confidante, she met with a very great surprise, a staggering blow!

At eleven o'clock that night, as she was preparing for bed, had removed certain coils of her hair and stowed them carefully away, had washed off her complexion and altered her appearance very considerably, a single, loud knock caused her to start and then to say, "Come in," and, to her astonishment, in swept Miss Darvall looking very white and resolute. "Oh, oh! so she is taking it like this," thought the matron to herself, as she said,—

"I wish to have a few words with you, Mrs. Clare; they are more satisfactory than writing."

What on earth did the girl mean!

Mrs. Clare felt irritated to feel herself quite small and horribly subdued, in flannel dressing-gown and scanty locks, before this pale, imperial-looking young beauty in flowing white silk and a wealth of youth and diamonds.

"My husband" (how odd it sounded) "has, thanks to you, found out a secret of mine and a friend's, more especially the friend's, as she is the mother of that little boy at Mrs. Gibson's. At present things look very black for me."

"They do, indeed!" said Mrs. Clare, complacently.

"I hope by to-morrow or next day to be in a position to disprove every unworthy suspicion. Meanwhile, Mrs. Clare, I have no further occasion for your services," she concluded, briefly.

"Meaning that you are so certain of reinstating yourself with Captain Elliot that I shall be *de trop*," said Mrs. Clare, with a bitter smile.

"You are quite mistaken! If Captain Elliot

never speaks to me again, if he divorces me, I part with you. I engaged you as my *chaperon* and companion, not as a domestic detective and spy!"

Mrs. Clare blanched—nay, she became yellow.

"I only did my duty, my dear," she exclaimed.

"Pardon me, your ideas of duty and mine are quite opposed. You knew I had some secret in my mind, and set to work to find it out, but you failed. My real secret, that I especially wished to conceal, was my marriage. In searching you stumbled upon another person's secret, one which places me in a very equivocal position with my husband. You, of all people, betrayed it to him, for what reason you, perhaps, know best. I," gazing at her, "can but guess! If you had done your duty, as I read the word, you would have come to me the instant you discovered what you doubtless considered my guilt and told me of the fact, condemned me, admonished to make amends and confession to Maxwell myself. If you had done this I would have told you all—all—even about my marriage, but you went to work in a sly, underhand way. You kept your discovery as a stone in your sling, and when you saw your way to striking with effect, you flung it—flung it yesterday. It has done its work. It," placing both her hands to her heart, "it has hurt me horribly, but it has done something else as well—it has flung you out of a good situation and a luxurious home. I doubt if you will ever be so comfortably placed again. You need not, in taking a similar place, apply to me, for I shall say that you are a selfish, indolent, deceitful, malignant woman!"

Here Mrs. Clare burst forth with volcanic passion.

"You are a young woman with an awful tongue, and a disreputable character!" cried Mrs. Clare, rising in her wrath. "At any rate, you must pay me, or give a quarter's notice. I would not stay here under your roof for treble the money!"

"Sour grapes! Here is a cheque I've drawn out for fifty pounds. Take it, and never let me

see you again! Your boxes and all belongings will be sent from Folkestone to any address you mention; you will please to leave this to-morrow. I am leaving also, so no fracas will be suspected; and I most humbly trust that I shall never see you, or anyone in the least like you, again!"

So saying, with a slight and haughty inclination of her head, Mary Darvall walked to the door, opened it, and disappeared, carrying with her, so to speak, her enemy's guns and colours, and all the honours of a great victory!

Worn out by an evening of the most exhausting emotions, she scarcely placed her head on her pillow ere she was sound asleep. She was completely worn out in body and mind by her recent experiences.

Next morning she did not appear. The longed-for afternoon post brought her a letter in Julia's well-known hand, which she tore open and devoured. It said:—

"DEAREST MARIE,—Yours just received. I answer it at once. Try and put off Captain Elliot in some way. I dare not acknowledge the child now. Father is more odd than ever, and talks perpetually with my marriage with some swell. Hector writes most miserable accounts of the bad times out there. I dare not face such poverty after this life here; it would just kill me. Meanwhile, my dearest, truest, and best of friends, keep my secret, as you have hitherto done; don't betray me! What would become of baby and me only for your generosity? You are my only hope; I throw myself on you, knowing you will not fail me. Keep Captain Elliot in the dark; tell him it is a maid's child. Tell him anything but the truth about me; and meanwhile, till things change for the better, wait! This is the prayer of your devoted and grateful friend and cousin, JULIA CAMPBELL (so you—DARVALL to everyone else)."

Mary perused this letter twice over with feelings of the keenest disappointment. She, who had done so much for Julia, and Julia would do nothing for her!

Her heart burnt like fire within her. No longer would she be Julia's tool and scapegoat. Julia must find for herself the future.

She would wash her hands of one who, being appealed to in a desperate extremity—in a case where her friend's name, honour, and life's happiness was in the balance—writes wait!

"I've had a letter," said Mary, rising, as her husband entered the library. "Here, you may read it," holding it out. "I am terribly disappointed! I have sacrificed much for Julia, my cousin—taken up and provided for the child, which she abandoned, entirely out of my own pocket. I have paid her debts. I've made her father a liberal allowance, and left him undisturbed possession of Danesford. I told her, when she ran away and left me her child, that I was risking my own good name and my future happiness; but she does not care what happens to me, as you will see by her letter," tendering it as she spoke.

"Heartless, selfish, wretch," he exclaimed, as he came to the end of the epistle. "And so the child is hers."

"Yes. She is privately married to a stockman in Australia—an old lover. He is a common man, but worthy and excellent; too good for Julia, who is quite ready to desert him as well as his child. His name is Hector Campbell."

"And you have been Mrs. Campbell's screen and cat's-paw all along?" looking at her in amazement.

"Yes."

"Mary! I humbly implore your pardon for a great wrong that I did you yesterday. Will you forgive me? Will you allow me to take your affairs in hand at once?"

"Yes; but I should like Julia to confess to you herself. How do you know this letter is genuine?"

"Anyone could see that it has a weak, selfish, heartless, woman scrawled all over it. You could not compose that letter to save your life."

"Yes! Hille you thought of my life last evening."

"I am ashamed to recall it. I was mad with grief and pain and rage. Do you know what I am going to do now? Write to Mrs. Gibson."

"Oh! Why?"

"You shall see," taking up a sheet of paper and writing away rapidly,—

"Mrs. GIBSON.—The child in your charge is the son of Mrs. Hector Campbell, Danesford Place, near Caversham. You will have to apply to her for funds and instructions for the future, as I do not wish my wife to take any future interest in Mrs. Campbell's concerns. Mrs. Campbell is known, and you had better address her as Miss Julia Darvall."

"MAXWELL ELIOT."

"August 2nd."

"Now, if you will address this it shall go this post," passing it towards her as he spoke. "My next move will be to go down to Carn-gort and have a serious talk with this Julia Darvall."

"A talk. Oh! you don't know Julia. It will do no good!"

"Yes; it is time that her eyes are opened to the fact that she can no longer shove her burdens on other people's shoulders," he returned emphatically, as he stamped the letter.

"Then let me manage it. I will write. I will even go down to Danesford. It will be far better."

"Certainly not. She will only make a scene, and cry and hug you, and make you her cat's-paw as usual. Miss Julia requires to be dealt with firmly. You have a weakness for her and she trades upon that fact."

"She does, indeed," returned Mary, glancing ruefully at the letter.

"I shall go down to Carn-gort this evening, and shall open the trenches from there with caution. You, I suppose, would not come with me?"

"No," shaking her head; "I shall stay here till the whole affair is sifted and cleared up, till

Julia comes forward and acknowledges her child, and all suspicion is thrown to the winds. You had better tell Mrs. Seymour that to you I am cleared. We had rather a scene last night, and I would not be surprised if she turned me out-of-doors. By the way, talking of turning people out-of-doors, I have sent Mrs. Clare about her business."

"Really! You must have required a good deal of nerve to do that. She was not an easy person to tackle," rejoined her husband, admiringly.

"Are you sorry that she has gone?"

"I. Good gracious, no! What was the woman to me?"

"A very agreeable companion, to say the least of it."

"Now, now, Mary! You are never going to begin by being jealous of Mrs. Clare. Why, she was nearly old enough to be my mother."

"That goes for nothing. Some men—as for instance George IV.—preferred women when they were fair, fat and forty, and you certainly paid no end of attention to Mrs. Clare, and found evident pleasure in her society. Every one could see that, that was not blind."

"And do you know the reason why I talked to her?"

"The reason, as I have already said, was patent to every eye."

"No, I think not. It was because she was your companion; because I presume she knew you intimately; because I could talk to her about you."

"Why did you not go to the fountain-head and talk to me?"

"Because I am proud. I never give anyone a chance of snubbing me twice, and you were always surrounded by a crowd of other fellows."

"And what did Mrs. Clare tell you about me? Nothing very good I am sure!"

"She thoroughly understands the art of faint praise—I will say that for her—and has reduced the art of insinuating disagreeable things to a perfect science. She never said anything bad outright. She was far too cautious, but she never gave you a good word. I saw through her immediately; besides, I had heard of her before. She little knew that I was aware, by hearsay of accredited witnesses, that she had broken her darling Tom's heart by her flirtations, and then worried him to his grave between her tongue and her debts. At first I thought she had been malignant, but I very soon discovered her capabilities of heart and speech. Now I am going to speak to Sophy. I have no time to lose if I am to go down to Caversham to-day. You will give me your company over to Canterbury, won't you? By Jove!" looking at his watch, "it is time to make a start. Five minutes I give you to dress, and five I give to Sophy to make all square between you!"

Exit Captain Maxwell Eliot.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE day following his arrival, Captain Eliot drove over to Danesford in a dog-cart, immediately after luncheon. A pretty pony-carriage and pair of cream-coloured ponies, decked with bells, was standing at the door; and two servants in livery were waiting on the steps.

"Could he see Miss Darvall?" he inquired.

"Miss Darvall was just going out," rejoined the butler.

"Still, I think she will see me!" said Captain Eliot, sending in his card and sighing with confidence.

After a very long delay, the answer came "that Miss Darvall was not feeling very well, and could not receive Captain Eliot, but that Mrs. Darvall was at home; the ponies were to be taken back to the stables."

"This excuse shall not serve her!" he said to himself, fiercely. "She thinks she is dealing with Mary. Can you let me have a sheet of paper and a pencil?" he asked of the clerical-looking butler. "My errand to-day is of the greatest importance."

The required paper and pencil was speedily

forthcoming, and in two minutes the following little note had been dashed off, twisted up, addressed, and despatched to Miss Darvall, who, still wearing her hat, was peeping from behind the blind upstairs, in the hopes of seeing her unwelcome visitor drive away!

No doubt he had come to say something disagreeable. She really must get round Mary before she met Captain Eliot.

As she stood revolving various plans for her own comfort, the note he had just written was respectfully handed to her. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR MRS. CAMPBELL,

"Can you not spare me a few minutes' conversation? If it is quite impossible, I must address myself to your father instead."

"Yours faithfully,

"M. ELIOT."

"Mrs. Campbell, indeed! Oh, show him up!" turning to her maid. "Send him into the little drawing-room; say I will be down at once, and go and bring me up here a decanter of sherry, and a wine-glass. I must brace up my courage for a good scene, I fancy," she said to herself, as she removed her hat and gloves and smoothed her hair, and looked at herself in the glass.

As her visitor waited below Mr. Darvall passed through the hall, and, after staring at him for a moment with a heavy look of dim recognition, came forward and said,—

"Captain Eliot! When did you come down? Very pleased to see you. The ladies are all at home. Won't you walk into my den, and pay me a visit first! Burns is away, and I'm a bit dull."

Max removed his hat, and followed the slouching figure of his host into a small room off the hall that smelt like a low public-house, so strong was the aroma of rum and brandy and rank tobacco.

It had originally been old Mr. Darvall's writing-room, and opened off the library, though it was usually entered, as now, from the hall.

And what a change had come over its appearance! Old proof before letters prints had been removed, and cheap racing and sporting pictures covered the walls, as well as portraits of "pets" of the ring and the ballet. A forest of pipes bristled on the chimney-piece, the *Shipping News*, *Police News*, *Sporting Gazette*, &c., littered the table and floor; several orange telegraph envelopes lay scattered, and a split-case stood in a prominent position in the centre of the table, the bottles at low ebb.

"Have a nip!" said Mr. Darvall, hospitably, laying his hand on a bottle as he spoke.

"No thank you; I never touch spirits in the daytime."

"Oh! Well, wait till you are my age, and you will see that you can't get along comfortably without your tot in the morning," pouring out half a tumbler of brandy with a shaky hand, and filling it partially with water. "Here's your health!" tossing off the half of it, to show he did not prescribe for others what he did not take himself. "Have you come down to stop?"

"No; not for more than a few days. I came down on business."

"Oh, business. Was it that brought you here to-day?"

"Yes; I particularly wish to see Miss Darvall."

"Oh, is that what you are after? Well, I've nothing to say against it. You are as likely a match as she could get, and Julia is getting on, and she's not an heiress now, as you know. That girl of Godfrey Darvall's turning up at our own gate played the deuce!"

"Do you mean me to understand that you think I am a suitor for Miss Darvall's hand?" inquired Max, gravely.

"Understand!" with a wink. "To be sure, and you are welcome to her, my boy! She and Mrs. D—don't hit it off, and she is a bit extravagant. However, you can stand that; you are a rich man!"

"I am not applying to Miss Darvall—allow me to correct that mistake at once."

"Not!" finishing the tumbler; "sorry to hear that."

"I am married to the other Miss Darvall."
"Eh! Nonsense, you are joking. We have never heard a word about it!"
"No; not as yet; but now everyone will know it!"

"And you will be turning us out!" frowning heavily.

"No; certainly not, as far as I am concerned; but I shall take my wife's affairs into my own hands, and put everything on a square footing. The—the making over of the property and funds was conducted in rather a slipshod fashion. Was it not, Mr. Darvall?"

"Do you mean," he stammered, "to come down on me for arrears for three years' rents?"
"Oh, no; but I shall require a little information respecting a sum of twenty thousand pounds that was in the funds, and that has never been accounted for!"

Mr. Darvall's hand shook as if he had the palsy, and he filled himself out another bumper which seemed to give him confidence; though his crimson face had a faded ashen look as he said,—

"That will be all right, old man—right as a trivet. By the way, do you ever do anything on the turf?" taking up a couple of telegrams and smoothing them out.

"Very little. I've ridden a few races—regimental—that's all; but I never had more than a fever on my mount!"

"But you don't bet!"

"No! I did once, and burnt my fingers badly!"

"I bet! There's nothing like it. Nothing to beat the excitement. I won a good bit, but latterly I've dropped a pfe. However, I'm going to be a man or a mouse to-day—the Goodwood Cup, you know. I stand to win a pot of money on 'Tam-o'-Shanter!'"

"He is the favourite, isn't he, and at short odds now?"

"Yes; but I backed him a month ago, and I have not hedged a farthing. I'll know my fate by three o'clock. It makes one restless, this sort of thing hanging in the balance."

"What?"

"Well, if he wins I clear forty-five thousand. I'm made for life. I've not been able to settle to anything to-day."

"If he loses?"

"If he does! He could not—not at the weights! Besides, I got the direct 'tip!' If such a thing did happen!" his eyes roving restlessly round the room—"I'm done!"

"Miss Darvall is waiting for you in the blue drawing-room, sir!" said a footman at the door.
"All right, I'm coming. Well, good-bye, Mr. Darvall," rising. "I hope, for your sake, that 'Tam-o'-Shanter' will be first past the post to-day. Forty-five thousand pounds is a fortune. I shall probably see you before I leave for town."

"Yes, I'll call over. We must talk about money matters. You won't press me about that little sum you spoke of, eh! You'll give me time. I'm rather short just now."

"Oh, yes! I never press anyone, but you will understand that some day—of course, at your convenience—our family lawyers will manage the matter. That fellow in Caversham of Mary's is no use at all!" So saying, with a nod, he quitted the room, and following the servant presented himself before Julia.

Julia, wound up by a glass of sherry, was sitting in an arm-chair looking like a thunder-cloud. Instead of saying, "How do you do?" or any little civility of that kind, she burst out the moment the door closed,—

"Well, what is it? What do you want? What brings you?"

"This," producing her own letter. "This brought me."

"Show it to me!" stretching out her large white hand. "Yes," examining it. "Well?"

"I came down expressly to see you," now taking a seat. "Talking is more explicit than writing. Writing one sometimes says more than one intended."

"So they do!" fiercely tearing the letter across and across, and then into tiny little scraps, which she flung upon the carpet with passionate force.

"Why do you that?"

"To give you a lesson. Now you have no proofs!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you can prove nothing against me. If I chose to say that child is Mary's, who can contradict me?" facing him with an air of bold defiance.

"And do you mean to disown the child?"

"Certainly I do. I hate it. I was mad to have married Hector, to return to my former level; and as to going out to him and living up in the bush as a stockman's wife, never seeing a soul for months but blacks—mutton, mutton, mutton to eat, and tea and damper! Ugh, throwing up her hands, "I think I see myself!"

"Who is to claim the child and pay for its keep?"

"Why, Mary! Who else?"

"I would not have believed that such ingrained selfishness and ingratitude existed," he said, looking at her angrily. "You are lower than the beasts; they have maternal instincts."

"Call me beast, or what you like! I don't care. Hard words break no bones. Mary is my cousin; she is literally rolling in riches. She owes me plenty, for I was a kind friend to her when she was nothing but a common girl. I picked her up from the gate, and made her my maid and companion. If you and she think to fix that child on me, and to bully me into acknowledging it, you are vastly mistaken."

"You used to be a good-natured, frank young woman, with some ideas of honour and some sense of right," exclaimed Max, rising, and looking at her. "What has changed you! You are scarcely human."

"Mouney! It has changed me, it has changed Jack Burn, it has changed father. In a moment of folly I thought I would go back to my old life and my old lover. I went. I'll stick to Dunsford and England, and money and luxury."

"And make your cousin Mary suffer for your sins! Make her pay your debts—support your forsaken child—sacrifice her good name and reputation to screen a worthless woman like you! Never, whilst I can stand by her."

"Oh! So you have made it up!" she said with a sneer.

"Words are of no use with you, Mrs. Campbell."

"I'm not Mrs. Campbell. Prove it before you call me that."

"Words are of no use; they break no bones. I'll give you a taste of deeds instead. In the first place, Mrs. Gibson, the gardener's wife, is referred to you for the future. Mary shall not interfere again with you or your affairs. She has had enough of them! I have written to Mrs. Gibson to that effect. As you won't acknowledge the child, the woman in Folkestone where you lodged will come forward and testify to your identity as its mother. This when you are summoned by law for the support of your offspring. So you will have to make a virtue of necessity. Mary will no longer make any payments for you in any shape or form. You shall depend on your own resources for the future."

"Wretch!" cried Julia, springing to her feet. "Begone, and do your worst. No one will believe you. You will never find the woman, clever as you think yourself. Go! I desire you to leave this house this instant, and never to show your face inside the doors again."

"Nonsense! You are mad," he returned, calmly. "You forget that this is my wife's house—that everything in it is here; that your father's income, and the very bread you eat, comes from her liberality. If she resembled you in disposition, she would use her power and thrust you out of doors."

At this moment a report of two shots was heard downstairs. Julia turned pale to the very lips. Perhaps, nay, probably the thought that flashed through Max Elliot's mind also flashed through hers.

"Stay here," he said. "I shall go and see what has happened. Don't be alarmed. Some one cleaning guns, and firing caps, no doubt!"

"It was in the room underneath this," she

answered, between her teeth. "Raper's room. I will go too. He has a revolver. He—"

"You will stay here!" said her opponent, firmly. "I implore you for your own sake—"

At this moment the door opened, and a terrified looking man-servant appeared. He would not speak before Julia, but he signalled Max, who followed him at once into the corridor, closing the door behind him.

"It's all along of these races," began the man.

"What?" inquired Captain Elliot.

"Mr. Darvall has shot himself. He is lying dead in the little room below."

Already a crowd had assembled in the hall, and Max found himself taking the management of the whole household. One man he despatched for a doctor, another for a magistrate. The housekeeper he sent to look after Mrs. and Miss Darvall, and, above all, to keep them upstairs, and then he entered the room he had quitted about three-quarters of an hour previously.

The smoke of the recent shots still hung in the air. On the ground lay Mr. Darvall, with a handkerchief over his face, to conceal the horrid sight. He had blown his brains out. Beside him lay a telegram, on which was written,—

"Goodwood, 2.30. Retribution, Camilla, Bunybody. Tam-o'-Shanter nowhere."

So he had lost the forty thousand pounds, and this was his alternative—death!

Jack Burn, who had only just heard the news, now rushed into the room—almost speechless. As he looked down on his dead shipmate, and felt his pulse, which had stopped for ever, he burst into a storm of sobs.

"And this, Ben," he cried, amid his paroxysms of grief, "is all the great fortune has brought you to. We might have expected no better. And—there's a fate in these things, say what they will. You staked your all on one big venture, and the horse that ruined you is—Retribution! Aye!—aye! and it's all Retribution!"

(To be continued.)

VIRGINIE'S SUITORS.

(Continued from page 12.)

It did not soothe his feelings when she entered his room the next morning to be told that amica was good for bruises, and he noticed a shade less respect in her voice and manner.

"I shall have to leave here," he said, disgustedly. "I can't show my face after last night's affair—and yet to-day I must. I hope to Heaven Kitty won't hear of this. Thank goodness, she will be at a loss to assign any reason for Averill's madness! I'll go to law with him—no, I won't; that would mean worse exposure. Oh, dear!—oh, dear! I'm afraid Cartmell will withdraw his patronage now! Why was I such a fool as to speak to Virginie!"

The church bells rang out—the vicar was absent, and Latimer knew no man who could take duty for him, so he was compelled to go out. He went down the long streets with as much speed as his aching limbs would allow. He shrank from the glances of all he met, and almost wished he were deaf, that he might not hear the ill-suppressed merriment of those who but a short time since had worshipped him, and pandered to his vanity.

His sermon that day was trite and commonplace, and it added not a little to his discomfort that Virginie was one of the congregation—Virginie, with grave, pale face, and steady, inscrutable eyes.

"Oh! to recall the past few days! Oh! to be safe and glad in her love once more!"

In the afternoon he wrote to Kitty, alleging an indisposition of a somewhat severe nature as the reason for his non-appearance at the Old set on Saturday night; then he slept until five, for there was no afternoon service at St. Stephen's.

In the evening he again repaired to church. Virginie was there, unaccompanied, and after the

service he left the vestry with unseemly haste, in order to overtake her.

He feared he had missed her, but at last, as he turned the corner of a street, he saw her well-known form before him, and hurried in pursuit after her.

She heard his step, his hard breath, as he came up behind her,—

"*Virginie!*" he said, and she confronted him, with fixed, immobile face. "*Virginie!*" he repeated, entreatingly, "speak kindly to me; I am very desolate!"

"From to-night, Mr. Latimer, you must address me as Miss Farren. We have nothing in common, and I should be glad if in the future you would endeavour to avoid me!"

"And yet you love me," he weakly remonstrated.

She flushed with shame.

"Say, rather, I loved you; but that is past. I could have borne pain and poverty so long as you were true to the ideal I had formed of you—but your treachery, your sordid meanness, has changed all that; and now, if you were free and knelt to me, imploring my love, my answer would be, 'I cannot trust you, leave me to myself.'"

He tried to catch her hand, but she drew back.

"No," she said, in the same chill tones, "we can clasp hands no more, you and I. Would it not be well to go before your importunity goads me to crueler words and crueler thoughts?"

"Love, is there no pity for me? Think of all my future spent with a woman I do not love; think of my hopeless yearning for your voice, your smile, your presence. Oh! do not forget there is no day in which I shall not want you."

"You offend me, Mr. Latimer," she answered, "and insult Miss Godfrey most bitterly. I think you are mad to talk as you have done. Will you go now?"

"Yes, as you wish it. But I believe your heart will reproach you in the future for all your harshness. Like all women, you won't listen to reason. A man would see just where my marriage with you would make shipwreck of my life."

"Pardon me, Mr. Latimer, you can have small idea of a man's thoughts or feelings; and, being incompetent to treat the subject, it were wisest to leave it alone."

"How changed you are! Oh! my dear, I will not believe you have so soon forgotten."

"I have not forgotten, and never shall. There will be no day, no night, when I shall forget the wrong you have done me, or cease to regret my credulity and affection. Do not try to see me again, it will be in vain," and then she left him standing on the moonlit street, alone, discomfited, dejected, and ashamed.

In the morning he went to the *Chalet*. He was told that Miss Godfrey was engaged, but Mr. Godfrey would see him in the breakfast-room.

"God!" he thought, "can they have heard of Saturday's affair? Well, I must trust to my own invention to help me out of the scrape," and he went in with an uneasy sense of further trouble.

Mr. Godfrey did not rise from his chair, neither did he vouchsafe any other greeting than a prolonged stare and an ominous grunt.

"Good morning," Darcy said, trying to speak lightly. "I hoped I should see Kitty this morning. It seems quite an age since Friday last."

"And it will be an age before you see my girl again," broke out the irate old man. "I don't want any dandified, cowardly, secondarily fellers after her, I tell you. I dare say her fortune seems very pretty to you, but it isn't for you, and the sooner you show a clean pair of heels the better for you."

"Sir," with a nice assumption of dignity, "I do not understand your coarse allusions; I can only believe you are either joking with me, or that some malicious person has poisoned your mind against me. I assure you Miss Godfrey's fortune has had nothing to do with my offer of marriage."

"That is a lie!" shouted Mr. Godfrey, "and all the swearing in the world won't make it

truth. Look 'ee here, I've had an early visitor here this morning, and he told me a story of you I wish I could disbelieve for my girl's sake. Perhaps you will deny that you know Mr. Ross Averill?"

Darcy started, and grew a thought paler.

"I know him very slightly."

"You do, young man. Well, I'm taken with that lad, and he's got the right sort of stuff in him; but you—oh, you—well, you ain't fit to run in harness with him. P'raps you'll say you never engaged yourself to Kitty whilst you were bound to another lady—p'raps you'll swear you never even heard Miss Farren's name!"

"I can't say that she is a stranger to me. I have known her from childhood, but at best we were only friends. Let me see Miss Godfrey; I can explain all to your mutual satisfaction."

"What! Even the horsewhipping of Saturday!" breaking into a grin. "Well, you're a cleverer fellow than I took you for, and I'm danged if you shan't see Kitty. Let every man have fair play, say I, and we'll hear both sides of the case before we decide to do anything. Ring the bell, Latimer."

In a short time Kitty appeared. She was carelessly dressed, her hair was loose about her neck, her face was pale, and her eyes showed signs of recent weeping; but there was a stamper dignity in her manner, so new that it staggered Darcy, who held out his hand to her with an incoherent greeting. She avoided the hand, and confronted him, a resolute, honest English girl.

"Darcy," she said, and her voice would tremble despite her utmost efforts to steady it, "will you answer me one or two questions? Thank you, I will not keep you long. Is it true that you love Miss Virginie Farren, but that you love my fortune better? Ah! your face answers for you. Do not speak, do not lie to me any more. I should like to have some kindly remembrance of you, to retain a little respect for you."

"Listen," he said, swiftly. "I love you very, very dearly!"

But his face gave the lie to his words, and Kitty shrank away from him.

"No—no!" she said. "The time has gone by for deception, and I know you for what you are; but had you proved less unworthy I would have loved and been true to you to the very end. You should have had more pity upon two poor helpless girls, who had never done you wrong."

Then she burst into tears, and clung about her father, who stormily ordered Latimer from the house, and between his fierce invectives paused again and again to kiss and comfort his weeping daughter.

A year crept slowly by, and the love Virginie had once felt for Darcy Latimer had died out, and in its stead, Phoenix-like, from its ashes a brighter, steeper, truer love sprang into life.

She saw much of Ross all through the long months, and learned to rely on him in most things; but she did not easily learn what change had come to her, and when at last her heart's sweet secret could no longer be ignored by herself, she had no hope of winning Ross, for he maintained absolute silence concerning his regard for her, until she believed miserably he had ceased to care for her.

One night in August he found her alone, and she saw by his face he had something of importance to communicate.

"Virginie," he said, "I have received a very handsome offer from an old friend to-day. He is a lawyer and has settled in Bombay, where he wishes me to join him in the capacity of partner."

"And shall you accept?" she asked, after a pause, in which she fought for calmness, and she waited breathlessly for his answer.

"I think so. You see there is no one to miss me, and it is a fine chance for me."

He did not look at her as he spoke, or he would have seen her eyes were full of unshed tears. She was silent a moment, then she said,—

"Arnold and I will miss you very, very much," and then her sweet voice faltered and failed.

He turned swiftly, and caught her hands, and

by the light in his eyes she knew he loved her still.

"Virginie, sweetheart, love! It rests with you whether I go or stay. Tell me what to do. Shall I go?"

"I shall be very lonely if you do," she answered, demurely, and lifted her mouth to be kissed.

Darcy Latimer left Nettleford long ago, and went to enchant the foolish damsels of another parish far away from the scenes of his past exploits; there he succeeded in winning the affections of an elderly widow with a handsome fortune, whom he eventually married.

Kitty Godfrey became the wife of a dashing, honest squire, who made her life a happy one.

Arnold settled in the old house with his bride who was once Annie Cypson, whilst Virginie has lived to declare there is no man so noble as Ross Averill.

[THE END.]

IF I BUT KNEW.

—301—

CHAPTER XLIV.

HONOR MORLAND looked down at the cowering girl at her feet. It seemed to her then that her triumph was complete. She could scarcely keep back the cry of exultation that rose to her lips.

"How shall I leave the house without being seen!" whispered Rhoda, piteously.

"Leave that to me," murmured Honor. "I am very sorry for you, Rhoda, and I will do all I can to aid you in this your hour of greatest sorrow."

"You are indeed a true friend to me," sobbed Rhoda. "I shall never, never forget your kindness."

Honor looked a trifle uncomfortable at these words of unmerited praise. She dared not remain longer with Rhoda, for she knew that two or three partners would be looking for her.

"Stay here for at least fifteen minutes," she said, eagerly, "and by that time I will join you and tell you what plans I have made for you."

Rhoda could not think for herself, her brain was so benumbed. She could only nod in silence.

Scarcely five minutes had elapsed since Honor had quitted the *boudoir*, until Owen again knocked for admittance at the door.

There was no answer. He turned the knob, entered and found his young wife lying senseless upon the carpet. For the second time, Rhoda had given way to the awful agony that consumed her. Among those at the *file* was a young doctor. Owen summoned him hastily.

"Dear me, this is very serious!" exclaimed the doctor, as he bent over the prostrate form which Owen had borne to a couch. "Your wife has brain fever. It is a serious case, I fear."

The garden-party broke up quite suddenly. The news that Mrs. Courtney had been taken ill was rumoured among the revellers, and silently but quickly the guests took their departure, all save Honor Morland.

She went up to Owen, and laid a hand on his arm.

"Let me remain and nurse my dear friend Rhoda," she pleaded. "Do not refuse, I beg of you!"

"Let it be as the doctor says," answered Owen.

But the physician shook his head decisively. "This is a case requiring the most competent nurses. I am sorry to refuse you, Miss Morland, but in this instance I must do so."

Honor controlled the anger that leaped into her heart.

"You certainly mean well," added the doctor, "but in such a case as this even her nearest relatives are not to be allowed in the sick-room."

Honor was obliged to swallow her chagrin as best she could. If she had been allowed her way, the young wife who had come between her love and herself would never rise from the bed.

"When she is convalescing I will visit her," she said to herself.

As she had no excuse to remain longer in the house, she was obliged to take her departure along with the other guests.

When Owen Courtney had hurried to his room, after bidding Rhoda to remain there until his return, it was his intention to go to his room for writing materials, and returning to Rhoda, force from her a written confession of her love for his friend, and her intention to elope with him.

Under the circumstances, he could not very well carry his plan into execution. His rage against his hapless young wife turned to pity when he saw her lying there so helplessly before him.

During the fortnight that followed, the servants who knew of their master's estrangement from his young wife, and how little he cared for her, were greatly surprised to find themselves banished from the sick-room, while Owen Courtney took possession of it.

The fact was, he was puzzled at her raving. Sometimes, when taking the place of the trained nurse for an hour, he was troubled beyond expression to hear her go over again and again the scene that had taken place by the brook.

In her delirium Rhoda vehemently repulsed George Dalrymple, demanding of him how it was that he dared speak a word of love to her, the wife of another.

Then the scene would change, and she would fancy herself once more in her own room, falling on her knees and crying out to Heaven that she could not bear her husband's coldness.

Her words were indeed a great revelation to Owen. He had never dreamed of such a state of affairs. He was afraid lest the trained nurses should hear and understand her. But they only smiled at him.

"We never think of listening to what a patient says," they remarked. "Why, sir, we all know how you idolize your young wife, and it is not to be wondered at, for she is a noble young lady."

Their words appeased him somewhat. Often would Owen listen intently while Rhoda clasped her hands and moaned,—

"Oh, Owen, Owen, shall I ever be more to you than I am now? I love you! Yes, I love you, but you will never know it! If you only knew it, you would be surprised. Wife never loved husband more dearly, more devotedly than I love you. I would have devoted my whole life to you. I would have died for you! Every beat of my heart, every thought of my mind, every action of my life, is for you! I love you as no one else ever will, as no one has loved you! You may live many years, happy, flattered by the women of the world, but no love like mine will ever come to you. The wife who is to you as the dirt beneath your feet is the truest friend you have!"

Owen looked terribly distressed as he listened.

"The years will come and go, and you will never know that I love you," she babbled on, "though the torture of hiding it is almost unbearable. Is it my place to go to the husband who makes life so miserable for me and plead for his caresses—for his love? I would die a thousand deaths first!"

And Rhoda would rock herself to and fro, with clasped hands, weeping the bitterest tears. He was deeply touched. He could not tolerate anyone else hearing all this.

"I will live my life out without his love," she would sob aloud; "and then I will die. The earth and the soft green grass will cover me, and hide my secret from the world, and he will never know it. Our marriage was a terrible mistake. I ought to have gone away; but a strange spell came over me which I could not shake off, and I lingered in the sunshine of his presence. The hot, fierce light of his presence scorched the rose that bloomed in my heart until it withered on its stem. It is my punishment for having loved one who did not love me."

He would try to quiet her with kindly words; but she did not hear him. He would look at her and wonder how very strange it was that this girl loved him so dearly.

"Rhoda, my dear wife, listen to me," he would say. "I—I—shall try very hard to be kinder to

you than I have been. Do you hear me, do you understand?"

There was no gleam of love in the pale face; no light such as he had thought his words would bring there; no gleam of joy. She did not seem to understand him. He said to himself that he must be cautious; that he must not distress her by speaking words that would give her hope.

The news of the illness of Owen Courtney's young wife had traversed far beyond the small town. He was well known in London, and the papers of the metropolis copied the bit of news; but in doing so, they made a great mistake. The items read that the young wife of Owen Courtney had died from the effects of brain fever.

Miss Walsh read the article, and without delay she wrote to Owen.

In one part of her letter she said,—

"I should never have written you the following if the wife whom you had wedded through my mistake had lived. But now that she is gone, I will tell you the truth—that hapless deed came very near costing your poor Nina her life. From the time of your marriage to the present, she has never been the same. She loved you then, she still loves you."

"This is what I would advise you to do; wait a reasonable length of time, and then come and claim Nina and this time nothing shall happen to prevent the marriage of you two whom Heaven had intended for each other. I know Nina is breaking her heart day by day, hour by hour, for love of you."

"I urge you to come to her just as soon as you think it prudent, as I think it is my duty to warn you that Nina is fading away before our very eyes and your presence is the only thing that can save her life."

"I here enclose you a small portrait of her I had taken only a little while ago. Her face is as sweet as a flower, but, ah, me! one cannot help but read the sadness in every line of it."

It was just at the time when Owen was feeling kinder toward his wife than ever, that he received Miss Walsh's letter inclosing Nina's picture. He had done his best to try to crush out his hopeless love for one from whom Heaven had so strangely parted him.

Great drops of perspiration stood out on his brow as he folded the letter and turned the picture face downward on his desk.

It seemed to Owen that the bitter waves of death were sweeping over him. It was the reopening of the old wound in his heart that he prayed Heaven to heal. He loved Nina with all the strength of his manhood. He wished that he were dead. The pain seemed greater than he could bear. He found that he still loved sweet Nina, but he was bound to another in honour and conscience. He would try to do his duty toward the one who bore his name.

He took the letter to the open fire-place, where a log fire burned lazily, and knelt down before it, holding it to the flame. Red tongues of fire caught at it gleefully, and the next instant it was a heap of ashes, in one corner of the grate.

Then he held out the picture to the flames, but involuntarily he drew it back. He could not allow it to burn. It seemed to him that his own heart would burn first.

"Heaven give me strength to destroy it!" he cried. "I dare not trust myself to keep it. It will drive me mad!"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE flames touched the portrait, and with a cry Owen Courtney hastily drew it back.

No, no—a thousand times no! It would be as easy to burn the living, beating heart in his bosom.

While he had the strength, he hurried to his writing-desk, placed it in a pigeon-hole, shut down the lid, and turned the key. Then he buried his face in his hands.

He ruminated upon the strangeness of the position he was placed in. Both of these young girls loved him, while he loved but one of them, and the one whom he loved so deeply could never be anything in this world to him. He wondered

in what way he had offended Heaven that such a fate should be meted out to him.

At that moment quite a thrilling scene was transpiring at the railway station of the little town.

The London Express which had just steamed in, stood before it, and from one of the Pullman's cars there stepped a handsome man dressed in the height of fashion.

He sauntered into the waiting-room, looking about him as though in search of the station-master.

A woman entered the station at that moment, carrying a little child in her arms. She recognised the man at a single glance.

"Why, Mr. Kenward Monk!" she cried, "is this indeed you returning to your old home?"

Turning hastily around at the mention of his name, he beheld Mrs. Mayne standing before him.

"Yes; I have returned like a bad penny, Mrs. Mayne," he said, with a light, flippant laugh. "But judging from the expression on your face, you are not glad to see me."

"I have not said so," she answered.

"Sit down, Mrs. Mayne," he said, flinging himself down on one of the benches. "I should like to inquire of you about the women-folk of the village."

The woman sat down beside him, in obedience to his request.

"There is very little to tell," she answered; "everything in our village moves on about the same, year in and year out. Nothing of importance has taken place, except the marriage of your cousin, Owen Courtney."

"Ha, ha, ha! So my fastidious cousin has changed his name from Kenward Monk to that of Owen Courtney to please his uncle, has he! Well, I read of it in one of the papers, but I scarcely credited it. Between you and me, Mrs. Mayne, that was a mighty mean piece of work—the old fool leaving his entire fortune to him, and cutting me off without a penny."

"Every one knows that you were warned of what was to come unless you mended your ways," answered the woman.

"Bah! I never thought for a moment that the old fool would keep his word," retorted the other. "But you say that my cousin is wedded. That is indeed news to me. Whom did he wed—Honor Morland?"

"Oh, no," she answered, "not Miss Morland. Everyone in the village prophesied that he wouldn't wed her, although she was so infatuated with him."

"I suppose she is an heiress," said Monk, sagely knocking the ashes off his cigar. "It's easy enough to marry another fortune if you have one already."

"I don't know if she is an heiress," returned Mrs. Mayne, "but she's a real lady. Anyone can see that. But I fear that he is in great danger of losing her. She is now very low with brain fever, and it is doubtful whether she will live."

"Humph!" he muttered. "My visit here is most inopportune then. I wanted to see my cousin, and ask him for a loan of a few hundreds. He won't be in very good humour now to accede to my request. I think I'll keep shady and wait a fortnight before seeing him. But who is this?" he cried, looking at the child she carried in her arms. "I understood that your baby died."

"So it did," replied Mrs. Mayne. "This is the little foundling whom we are about to adopt. My husband brought it to me from a foundling asylum."

"Well, I do declare!" said Monk. "That's a risky operation, taking a little walf into your home, when you don't know its parents."

"But I do know its mother," she answered. "I wrote and found out all about its mother. She was a young girl who was taken ill in the streets. A poor family permitted her to be brought into their house, and there her babe was born. The young mother was so ill that the babe was taken to the foundling asylum by the doctor who attended her, where it could have constant attention, for its little life was despaired of. By a strange mistake, word was sent to the mother that the little one had died. But the baby rallied and recovered. Almost heart-broken over the news

of its death, the young mother disappeared. There was no one so interested as to make search for her, and tell her that her little one had been spared. In her flight she left behind her a package which contained some articles that may lead to her identity, if the child should ever want to find her hapless mother when she grows to womanhood. I have them with me now. Do let me show them to you, Mr. Monk."

At that moment the little one, who had been sleeping, slowly opened its great, dark, solemn eyes, looking up into the face of Kenward Monk, and uttered a plaintive little sob.

It was not often that he noticed little children—indeed, he had an aversion to them—but he could not understand the impulse that made him bend forward and look with interest into the flower-like little face.

Where had he seen just such a face? The great, dark, solemn eyes, so like purple pansies, held him spell-bound.

An impulse which he could not control or define caused him to reach out his trembling hand and touch the waxen little fingers, and the contact made the blood rush through his veins like fire. He tried to speak, but his tongue seemed too thick and heavy to perform its functions.

The woman did not notice his agitation. She was busily engaged in unwrapping a small parcel which she had tied up in oil silk.

Then, to his astonished gaze, Mrs. Mayne held up before him a beautiful bracelet made of tiny pink sea-shells, with a heavy gold clasp, upon which was engraved, "From K. to R."

If Mrs. Mayne had but looked at him, she would have seen that his face had grown ghastly.

At a glance he recognized the bracelet as one which he had designed and presented to Rhoda Cairn, when he believed her to be the heiress of the wealthy Cairns.

"That is not all," said Mrs. Mayne, holding up a man's pocket-book, which he recognized as his own—the identical one he had sent up to Rhoda Cairn by the porter, with a little change in it, on the morning he deserted her.

Again he opened his mouth to speak; but no sound issued from his lips. The pocket-book contained only a part of a sleeve-link that had belonged to himself, the other part of the link was in his pocket, at that moment.

In a flash the truth came to him—this little one was Rhoda's child.

He now recalled the appealing letters she had written to him at the hotel after he had deserted her. He had never answered them, for by that time he was trying to win the beautiful heiress, Mabel Drummond. He had told Rhoda that his marriage to her was not legal, while in truth it was as binding as law could make it.

He had cast all upon the throw of a dice, and it would never do for the poor young girl whom he had married to come between him and the young girl whom he was about to win.

He had resolved upon a desperate scheme to gain a fortune, by seducing the young girl whom he had made his wife into believing that she was not such, and going through the ceremony with the heiress.

But Fate had snatched the beautiful Mabel Drummond from his grasp just as he was about to wed her. Her brother came on the scene, and Kenward Monk beat a hasty retreat, as he had commenced to inquire into his antecedents.

All these thoughts flashed through his brain in an instant. Then he realized that Mrs. Mayne was speaking to him.

"A pretty baby, is she not?" said the woman, holding the infant toward him. "But we have decided not to keep her, after all. I am going to take the first train to London, and return the baby to the founding asylum, though Heaven knows I shall miss her sorely. We are too poor to keep her."

Kenward Monk turned toward her with strange eagerness.

"What do you say if I take your charge off your hands?" he asked, huskily.

"You, Mr. Monk?" exclaimed the woman, amazed. "Why, what in the world could you, a young bachelor, do with a baby?"

"I will give you twenty-five pounds to give me

the child. Is it a bargain, Mrs. Mayne? Speak quickly, before I change my mind!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

KENWARD MONK leaned forward, and caught Mrs. Mayne's arm, saying hastily—

"I repeat that you shall have twenty-five pounds if you will but give the child into my custody."

"Again I ask, what could you, a bachelor, do with it, Mr. Monk?" said Mrs. Mayne.

He had an answer ready for her.

"I know a family who lost a little one, and would be only too delighted to take the infant and give it a good home."

Mrs. Mayne breathed a sigh of relief.

"I am very poor, as you know very well, Mr. Monk," she answered, "and I cannot refuse your kind offer. Take the little one and welcome. Only be sure that it is a good home you consign it to."

He counted out the money and handed it to her, and she resigned the infant to his arms. At that moment they heard the shriek of the incoming express.

"That is the train I was going to take," she said, "and now I am out the price of my ticket, which I bought in advance."

"If you will give it to me, I will use it," he said.

She handed him the ticket, and in another moment Mrs. Mayne saw him get in the train with the child.

"I wonder if I have done right or wrong," she thought, a scared look coming into her face.

"It was all done so quickly that I had not the time to consider the matter. But this much I do know: I have the twenty-five pounds in my pocket, and that is a God-send to me. We need the money badly just now."

She turned and walked slowly away; but somehow she did not seem quite easy regarding the fate of the little child.

"I ought to have asked him the name of the family to whom he was going to take the baby," she mused; "then I could have written to them to be very careful, and to bring her up to be a good and true woman. I shall certainly ask him all about it the very next time I see him—that is, if I ever do see him."

Meanwhile the train thundered on, carrying Kenward Monk and the child away. It was hard to keep back the expression of mingled hatred and rage with which Kenward Monk regarded the infant he held in his arms. He knew full well that the child was his own, but he had no love for it. If it had died then and there, that fact would have afforded him much satisfaction.

He turned the situation over in his mind, and had to admit that truth was stranger than fiction. Fate had drifted this infant to the very village where he belonged. If by any chance his cousin, Owen Courtney as he chose to call himself, had learned of its parentage and the story of Rhoda Cairn, his last hope of a fortune would vanish.

Kenward Monk had laid out his plans carefully. He had come to ask his cousin to take him into partnership with him. He would tell Owen, and actually talk him into believing it, that he had turned over a new leaf, and was about to study for the Church. That story would be sure to win his cousin over to him, and he would agree to help him.

How strange that these people from the village should have this child in their possession. Now the question rose in his mind—"What disposition shall I make of it?"

But one course presented itself. He would take it to London, and once there, he would have no further trouble with it—he would manage to lose it. Many wails were found on the door-steps, and no one ever could trace their parentage, or whose hand had placed them there.

In all probability he would never run across Rhoda Cairn again. She believed her child dead.

While these thoughts were flitting through his brain, the little one commenced to cry. Its

piteous wails attracted the attention of more than one person in the carriage.

"Mother," said a buxom young woman sitting opposite, "I am sure that young man is a widower, left with the little child, and he is taking it to his folks. You see he is in deep mourning."

By a strange coincidence, Kenward Monk had donned this garb when he made up his mind to visit his native village, so that Owen and all the villagers would think he was wearing it out of respect to his deceased uncle. It stood him in good stead now.

"Yes, I guess you are about right, Sarah Ann," said the elderly woman.

"I'll bet that baby's hungry, mother, and I'll bet, too, that he hasn't a nursing-bottle to feed it from."

"You can depend upon it that he has one," remarked her mother. "Every father knows that much about babies."

"Of course he has it in his pocket; he never came away without one; but he is so deeply engrossed in his own thoughts that he does not hear the baby. Don't you think you ought to give him a little reminder of it?" said her daughter, thoughtfully. "You're an elderly woman, and can do it."

"He might tell me to mind my own business," said the elder woman. "Some strangers don't take kindly to other people meddling in their affairs."

"But this is a case of necessity," urged her daughter. "Don't you see how he sits staring out of the window? I tell you, in his grief he has forgotten all about the baby on his lap, and it must be very hungry. I can't stand its crying. Do go, mother!"

"Will you hold your tongue, Sarah Ann!" exclaimed the woman, impatiently. "It's probably crying because its overfed; it will go to sleep presently. If he was to feed it too soon, it would cry for hours on a stretch, and disturb everybody in the carriage."

"If you don't say something to him, I shall be obliged to," said Sarah Ann. "I feel ashamed to do so, for my sweetheart's the brakeman on the train, and he will be sure to get angry with me. You know, mother, that he is frightfully jealous, and would say that I only made the opportunity to speak to the young man because he was a young widower."

"That's so, my girl," said her mother, decisively.

As the plaintive wails of the infant increased instead of diminished, the elder woman got up and made her way up the aisle.

Kenward Monk started violently as he felt the heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Why don't you feed your baby, sir?" she said, brusquely.

He looked at her angrily, his brows bent together in a decided frown.

"What do you mean by interrupting my thoughts, woman?" he cried, harshly.

His angry retort roused all the antagonism in the woman's nature.

"I mean just what I say—your baby's hungry, mister," she replied. "If you had the feelings of a loving father, you'd know enough to feed it."

He looked at her in consternation.

"Feed it!" he echoed blankly. "I—I was not prepared for anything like this. Such a thing did not occur to me."

"And you didn't bring a nursing-bottle along with you?" echoed the woman.

"No," he responded, curtly, but also somewhat blankly.

"Good Heavens! that's just like a man, to forget important things like that."

"What am I to do?" he asked, appealingly. "What would you suggest, madam? I am at sea."

She looked at him perplexedly; then her motherly face brightened as she glanced about the car.

"I will soon see what can be done," she answered, making her way as quickly as the moving train would allow to the end of the carriage where two women sat with tiny infants on their laps.

Very soon she returned with the article she had gone in search of.

"Let me take the poor little thing," she said, "and feed it. Men, and more especially young men, don't know anything about such things."

Kenward Monk gladly delivered his charge into her keeping. Very soon the woman had stilled its cries, and it was sleeping peacefully in her arms. An idea then came to Monk. His pale blue eyes glittered with a fiendish light.

He almost laughed aloud at the thought that flashed through his mind.

"Do you think the baby will sleep a little while?" he asked, drawing his hat down over his face.

"It is likely to," she answered; "still one cannot always tell. Sarah Ann, my daughter here, never slept ten minutes on a stretch when she was a baby. She was a lot of trouble to me then; but goodness knows I don't mind it now, for she's a heap of comfort to me, sir. I wouldn't know how to get along without Sarah Ann. She—"

Kenward interrupted her impatiently. "I was going to say that if you would be kind enough to hold the little one for a while I would like to go into a smoking-carriage and smoke a cigar."

CHAPTER XLVII.

KENWARD MONK thought the woman did not hear his question, for she did not answer, and he repeated, in his suave, winning way,—

"Could I trouble you to hold the little one for a few moments, while I enjoy a smoke?"

The woman answered readily enough,—

"To be sure I will take care of the little one, sir. Go along and enjoy your cigar. I know just how a man feels when he is deprived of a smoke. My husband had to have his pipe every night after his supper, just as sure as the sun went down. If he missed it, he was fairly beside himself—like a fish out of water."

It suddenly occurred to Kenward that it wouldn't be a bad idea to know more about this woman.

"Do you live near here?" he asked.

"Just three stations on—near Larchmont village. We don't reach there for nearly three quarters of an hour, so that need not trouble you, sir. I take it that you are a widower, sir," she went on, before he could rise from his seat.

"Yes," he answered, shortly, and with considerable impatience.

"It's too bad!" chimed in Sarah Ann—"and to be left with such a young baby too. It's too bad that you didn't get a nurse for her, unless you are taking her to some of your folks."

"I have no relatives," he answered. "I am going to London for the express purpose of finding someone to take care of the child."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the elder woman. "How strange that you should come across me! Why, do you know, I used to take little ones in occasionally, and keep them for their fathers until they were old enough to get about. Before you look further, sir—although I don't like to recommend myself—I'd like to have you stop off at Larchmont and inquire all about me. There isn't a man, woman, or child for miles around but can tell you about me."

"Why, indeed it is a piece of good luck that I should have come across you, madam!" declared Monk. "We may be able to come to terms here and now."

"Don't ask too much, ma," whispered Sarah Ann under her breath.

"You can name your own price," said Kenward in an off-handed manner.

"Oh, I will leave that entirely with you, sir," said the widow. "I'll take the baby and care for her, and you can come and see her whenever you like. I'll leave the pay entirely to you.—That's fair enough, sir, isn't it?"

"You are too magnanimous," he declared. "By the way here's a five-pound note to start with. That's the only bank-note I have, except for very large sums. In the course of a few weeks I will make permanent arrangements with you."

"But surely you are going to stop at Larchmont, sir, and see where I live. I don't expect

that you will trust a dear little baby like this to a stranger. You will most likely want a recommendation."

"Your face is certainly recommendation enough my good woman," he declared. "Nevertheless, I shall, of course, stop with you."

He rose with a bow.

"Remember, sir," chimed in Sarah Ann, "that part of the train switches off just a few miles below there. If you don't look out, you'll be taken on to London."

"I must look out for that," he said. "I had certainly intended to take a little nap after my smoke. I haven't closed my eyes for two nights; the baby was not feeling well. Your warning will put me on my guard, at all events."

Again he bowed, and in an instant he had disappeared.

"I wonder what his name is," said Sarah Ann. "You forgot to ask him, ma."

"So I did to be sure. But it's easy finding that out."

Then they began discussing the baby and the young man who had consigned it to their care.

"He looks like a rich man," said the widow, "but I must say that the baby's clothes are not any too good. There isn't a stitch a lace on them, and the cambric that its dress is made of is of the coarsest kind."

"Well," said Sarah Ann, reflectively, "I think I can account for that. He has got somebody to make those things up for the baby. He has paid a big price for them, and knowing that a man wouldn't know much about those things, they have cheated him."

"That's about the way of it," sided the widow. "But it's a pity to take advantage of such a grief-stricken young man."

"What a pretty little thing it is!" exclaimed Sarah Ann. "But it doesn't look in the least like him. It has eyes as dark as violet while his are the prettiest blue I ever saw."

"Now don't go falling in love with him," warned Sarah Ann's mother, anxiously. "Widowers are all very nice, but for young girls I prefer single men. You know you are engaged already."

"But my lover is only a working man," pouted the young girl, "and not half as nice looking as this young man, and I am sure he must be enormously wealthy. Did you know that he had on a gold watch-chain instead of a guard, and wore a ring on his finger, and even had gold in his teeth? You can't tell me he hasn't money to burn."

"Don't you always be jumping at conclusions," said her mother. "We can tell better after we know him awhile. We will certainly take good care of the baby for its own sake."

"He will be sure to come up once a fortnight at least to see it. Don't you think so, mother?"

"No doubt," returned the elder woman.

"We'll have to fix up the house a bit," declared Sarah Ann, enthusiastically.

"We'll turn the ingrain carpet, put the torn part under the settee, where it will be out of sight, make a new paper lamp shade, and buy a few dishes. I can set on the cracked ones for myself. And, oh, dear me! how I wish I had a few plated spoons and a sugar bowl. But of course I shouldn't think of anything so costly."

"I have an idea, mother," cried Sarah Ann, enthusiastically. "Perhaps we can borrow the milliner's spoons and sugar-bowl, and the tongs that go with it. We can pretend that you are going to get a new bonnet, and I a new hat, this spring. So in hopes of getting our trade she will lend us the things."

"Now, Sarah Ann, stop that!" exclaimed her mother, angrily. "I'll neither borrow nor buy anything. If this genteel stranger cannot come in and take pot-luck with us and use the dishes we use, he can stop at the village hotel. Your father and grandfather eat off those dishes, and he's no better than they. And as to deceiving the milliner into the belief that I am going to buy a new bonnet, you shan't do anything of the kind. Why, it's only last week that Miss Frost got at me about buying a new bonnet, and it was when a crowd of us were walking home from church. Says she,—

"Mrs. Philpot, there's a shower a comin' up,

an' it will wet your bonnet and spoil it; then you'll have to buy a new one of me."

"I just turned on her. Says I,—

"Look here, Miss Frost, don't you go worrying yourself over my bonnet. If it does get wet and spoiled, I'll wear it just the same. I'm the one to be silted, and it suits me! Anyone who doesn't like the appearance of it, can just look the other way. It's a deal more durable and substantial looking than the flimsy things I see in some people's windows. An' now 'we never speak as we pass by' since then."

For a moment Sarah Ann looked thoughtful.

"I am sure she hasn't any grudge against you for that, ma. Indeed, she's trying to make peace with you, through me! Why, only a few days ago I met her in the post-office, and she said,—

"Well, well, Sarah Ann, why don't you come round oftener and have a chat with me?"

"I'd have nothing to do with her," replied the elder woman, sharply. "She's pleasant with you in order to get invited to our house. She only wants a chance to cut you out with your young man."

With a hearty laugh the girl threw her head back.

"How suspicious you are, mother!" she cried.

"What in the world would Miss Frost want with my lover?"

"She'd want anything in the shape of a man," declared her mother. "Women who have to earn their own living are always on the look-out for a man to support them."

Further conversation was stopped by the sudden waking up of the pretty, dark-eyed babe; but a little milk from the bottle and a few soothing words soon succeeded in quieting her.

"We are almost at the junction," said Sarah Ann. "Ought not somebody go into the smoking-carriage and inform the gentleman of it?"

"Why, certainly not. It's likely he knows of it. He was told of it, and it's likely someone will inform him. You had better look after your boxes and bundles. Be sure to pick up the bag of candy, the ginger-snaps, the bunch of bachelor buttons, the rosemary, my shawl, and your new pair of shoes."

"If I have to hold this baby and pick up my dress, it will be as much as I can do. But I'm quite sure the gentleman will come and take care of the baby himself," added Sarah Ann, wistfully.

The guard called out the station. It was the busiest junction thereabouts. Two trains met and passed each other here, while still another was side-tracked, waiting for the right of way. There was always a rush of people at the station, and consequently confusion and noise. Mrs. Philpot and Sarah Ann stepped on to the platform.

"We ought to have waited," declared the girl. "See, we have missed him, as I told you we should. I had better run back and see if he's there. He's probably going on to London. But he will be sure to see us, no matter what carriage he is in."

A moment more, and the two trains moved on. Even Mrs. Philpot was now thoroughly alarmed. What her daughter had feared had taken place. The young man had certainly missed them.

"Overcome with fatigue, he probably fell asleep in the smoking-carriage, in spite of himself," said Sarah Ann.

"Well, anyhow he knows your name and address, mother. He will be sure to telegraph back to us at Larchmont."

Still, Mrs. Philpot, who held the baby close in her arms, looked troubled.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"He has certainly been carried on to London," said Mrs. Philpot. "There is nothing left but to get home and await results."

"You're about right," said Sarah Ann.

They left word at the railroad station to at once bring up any telegram that might come for them.

An hour after they arrived at Larchmont, every-

one had heard of Mrs. Philpot and the baby, and her experience with the handsome stranger.

The telegraph operator at the station waited till midnight for any message that might come for Mrs. Philpot; but none arrived. Then he decided to wait until daylight; but with like result. And when the next day, and the next passed, and the stranger did not come to Larchmont, and no word, either by letter or dispatch, came from him, the village people got together and discussed the matter.

The village lawyer spoke very plainly.

"It looks to me as if you had been the victim of a trick," he declared. "This stranger has palmed off this child on you. I shall be very much surprised if he ever puts in an appearance."

The good woman looked distressed.

"I do not like to hear that," she said. "He appeared like a perfect gentleman."

"Appearances are often deceptive," retorted the lawyer, grimly. "I am going to offer you a little advice."

"Oh, no—no!" exclaimed Mrs. Philpot. "I don't want a bill coming in from you the first of the month, saying—'Advice concerning a child, two guineas.'"

"My advice is gratis in this instance," he returned, "and it is to send the child to some founding asylum in London. The man who left the child with you will never return for it."

"And I am just as sure that he will return for it," said Mrs. Philpot, energetically. "Thank Heaven that I have not lost all faith in humanity yet. I don't believe there is a man living who could desert such a lovely baby as this. Something has happened to him, I am sure. He may have met with an accident. Many things are liable to happen."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

When a fortnight passed, and the weeks lengthened into months, Mrs. Philpot began to be a little sceptical.

"We will keep the baby until he does come for it, Sarah Ann," she said.

Somewhat the little wail with the great dark eyes and the little rose-bud mouth had crept into their hearts, and they could not turn it away.

Sarah Ann did her share in looking after the baby; but it was a little hard, for she had a great deal to do waiting upon customers in the village bakery.

The mother and daughter made no further mention of the handsome stranger.

"If we had but asked him his name. I wanted you to, ma," declared Sarah Ann. "But there's no use in crying now. We have the satisfaction of having a baby, anyhow," declared the girl, spiritedly.

"Yes," assented her mother, dubiously; "but it's rather a task to bring up other people's children."

Meanwhile, freed from the care of the child, Kenward Monk walked away from the station.

A chuckle of delight broke from his lips.

"That was most cleverly managed. My compliments to Mrs. Philpot of Larchmont. She has been exceedingly useful to me."

He did not trouble himself as to what disposition they might make of the child.

The next question that occurred to him was—"how am I to destroy the proofs I have concerning the child?"

But no answer came to him regarding this dilemma. He thrust them back into his pocket.

Suddenly the thought came to him, that he would be foolish to turn back from the course he had marked out for himself. He would now go back and see Owen.

There was a friend of his living in the vicinity. He could find him, and pass a week or two with him, then he would carry out his original scheme. He acted upon his thoughts.

It was the fishing season, and Kenward Monk made a valuable addition to a party of young men already gathered at his friend's quarters. Five weeks elapsed before the party broke up.

"By this time Owen's wife must have recovered from her illness," he said, grimly. "If I don't go and see him now, they will probably be

getting ready to go off somewhere, and I will miss them."

Building the action to the word, Kenward Monk took the train the next day and arrived at his native village at dusk.

He had taken the precaution to provide himself with a long top coat and a slouch hat.

He avoided the station and its waiting-room, lest he should meet someone who might recognise him.

He struck into a side-path, and a sharp walk of some fifteen minutes brought him in sight of the old mansion.

How dark and gloomy the night was! There was no moon, and not a star shone in the heavens.

A short cut across the fields brought him to a little brook. He looked down upon it in silence as it gurgled on sullenly over its rocky bed.

He looked back at the grand old mansion looming up in the distance. And as he looked, he clinched his hands, and the bitterness in his heart became more intense.

"But for Owen all that would now be mine," he muttered. "He stepped between me and a fortune. When we were boys together, I realised that he would do it, and I hated him—hated him for his suave, winning ways, and the love which everyone showered on him. He was always lucky."

"Once when we went out swimming together, and he swam beyond his depth, and called to me to save him, I pretended I did not hear him. Heavens! how I hoped the next wave would carry him out to sea. But luck was with him; that very wave landed him on the shore."

"I remember how my uncle's face blanched when he heard of the danger he had been in, and how his hands trembled when he turned to my cousin, and said,—

"My dear boy, if you had died I should never have taken any more interest in life. I should have gone away out of sight and sound of the sea."

"I knew then, young as I was, that his very soul was wrapped up in my cousin. He should have divided his estate equally between us. But as the years went on I saw his preference for my cousin grow stronger and stronger. I was full of life, and he became a book-worm to please the fancy of an old man. I wouldn't do it; I had too much self-assertion. But he must divide with me. If he refuses—a terrible look shot into his eyes and a blood-curdling laugh broke from his lips—"well, the young wife he thinks so much of will be a widow, that's all, and, as next of kin, some of the estate will be sure to fall to me. I am a desperate man, and will take desperate measures."

He turned and looked again at the great stone mansion, whose turrets were dimly outlined against the sky. And as he looked he saw a door on the rear porch open and a figure clad in a white fleecy dress glide out upon the porch and walk slowly into the grounds.

"That is probably the bride," he muttered, with a harsh little laugh.

To his surprise, she crossed the lawn and made directly for the spot where he stood.

"I shall not be likely to get a good look at her unless the moon comes out," he thought.

He drew back into the shadow of the alders that skirted the brook. His bitter, vengeful thoughts were turned aside for a moment while watching the advancing figure.

"Why should my cousin have wealth, love, happiness, while I have to knock about here and there, getting my living as best I can, being always in hard luck and a mark for the arrows of relentless fate?" he soliloquised.

Nearer and nearer drew the slender, graceful figure.

Kenward Monk was right. It was his cousin's wife.

She went on slowly over the greensward in the sweet night air, little dreaming what lay at the end of her path. She walked on slowly. Nothing disturbed her, save that the rabbits ran before her and the night-birds cried in the trees.

As she passed the hedges all abloom, the scent of clover reached her. The breath of violets wet with dew was heavy, on the evening air.

She paused when she reached the brook. She did not sit down on her favourite rock, but stood beside the rippling water, with head bent and her hands clasped.

"How can I endure my life!" she muttered. "I only wish I had died when I was—How strange it is that some people who crave death, live, while others, who have everything to live for, die!"

"One thought haunted me as I lay tossing on my bed. If I could only see the village merchant's wife and that dear little babe again. But I dare not send for them, lest it should provoke comment."

"It is now nearly seven weeks since I saw them. She promised to come here often; but I have never seen her since."

By the merest chance the hapless young wife had come across the letter that Miss Walsh had written to Owen. It had fallen from his pocket when he was looking over some papers on the porch one day.

Passing by soon after, Rhoda saw the paper lying there, picked it up, and opened it. There, while the sun shone and the birds sang, she read it through, and the wonder was that she did not die then and there.

(To be continued)

SINCE the days of the old-fashioned stereopticon, the improvement of projecting and moving pictures has been one of the surprising advances of the age. From that crude and imperfect beginning, the evolution of the present marvellous effects has been steady, and, considering what has been achieved, exceedingly rapid. It is now possible to throw upon canvas the most perfect delineations of life—a street with everything in motion, and with all as clear and distinct as though actually seen by the unaided vision. Among the latest improvements in this line is one by means of which the operator may introduce other figures into pictures already shown. It is possible to do this with ordinary lantern slides, and change and shift the picture in such a way that the realistic effect is enhanced rather than diminished. The same lantern will permit of the use of kineoptoscope accessories, which add so much to the success of entertainment.

VERY few people realise what an easy thing it is to make a ladder that will reach well up into the tallest-fruit trees. Instead of the heavy and cumbersome articles now in use, light, manageable ladders may be made from material available in almost every locality. Either a long and slender sapling may be selected, or a piece of sawed stuff with perfectly straight grain. A split sapling is much better, as there is no danger of the cross grain and weak spots, provided the tree has grown straight and symmetrical. If the trunk is large enough, it may be split into four sections, and each of these dressed down to a strip about three inches wide at one end, and an inch and three quarters at the other, the strip preserving the thickness of one inch all the way up with a gradual taper from base to top. When four of these strips are prepared they are marked with suitable spaces. Slots about one inch by one and a half inches made of straight-grained wood, hickory being preferred, are placed at appropriate distances, and upon either side of either end, the long strips are nailed or fastened with strong wooden pins. Properly planned and carefully put together, a ladder of this sort can be made strong enough to bear an ordinary man, and with further extension and more slender top would sustain the weight of a lad to the top of the highest tree. A heavier lower section with an extremely light extension could be made perfectly safe and practical. The strips on either side of the rungs firmly bolted together make a ladder much stronger than that constructed of the ordinary single piece on either side.

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FACETIÆ.

"WHAT do you think of my last story?" asked Whipples of the critic. "I think you were wise to make it your last."

LIONEL: "It is declared that men in a savage state never have the toothache." Loo: "I have never yet seen anyone with the toothache who was not in a savage state."

"HOPKINS never tells funny stories now." "Any special reason?" "Yes; he says whenever he tells one he has to listen to several poorer ones from the other man."

ANXIOUS PATRON: "Doctor, don't you think you'd better call in some other physicians for consultation?" Family Doctor (cheerfully): "Oh, no, not yet. There is still some hope."

BROWN: "Do you know that the majority of physicians are comparatively poor men?" Jones: "No, I wasn't aware of that; but I know some of them are awfully poor doctors."

"OUR hearts, our thoughts, our very being grow tender with age," said the poetic landlord. "Yes," said the boarder, who was battling with a piece of fowl; "but hens don't."

"Jack, dear, it isn't a bit nice of you to let such small troubles worry you so soon after our marriage." "They do seem insignificant when I think of that."

PLANKINGTON: "I understand that you had to go to law about that property that was left you. Have you a smart lawyer?" Bloomfield: "You bet I have. He owns the property now."

"Yes, grandma, when I graduate, I intend following a literary career—write for money, you know." "Why, Willie, my dear, you haven't done anything else since you've been at college."

Mrs TOW: "You should model your bathing dress after your friend's. Look how modest it is in the neck." Miss Unda Towe: "That isn't modest, ma. It's a mole."

RAUCOUS YOUTH: "Darling, my salary is £3 a week. Do you think you could live on that?" His Affianced: "Why, yes, George, I can get along on that. But what'll you live on?"

"HERE," said the philanthropist, "is a penny. Now, let me give you a little advice. Never—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Tired Tim. "Take back your money. My lowest price for listenin' to a sermon is a shilling."

"I SUPPOSE classical music is all right in its place," said Maud. "I'm sure it is," replied Mamie. "I don't care to listen to it myself, but sometimes you have to play it in order to get a man to go home."

"In France it has been decided by the courts that an unmarried woman becomes an old maid at thirty." "That rule would never do in this country." "Why not?" "Single women never reach the age of thirty."

"MY DEAR," said a fond mother to her child, "why do you not play with the little Jones boy?" "Oh, he's horrid! He says bad, naughty words, just like papa does." Reform will begin at home in that family.

AFFABLE ARIANTOCRAT: "The fact is, my name is not Gibson. You see, I'm travelling incog. There's my card." Our Mr. Tuppings: "Glad to hear it. I'm travelling in pickles. Here's mine."

MOLLIE LITTLESER: "I know that Clarence has made a good many crooked paths, but don't you think that he will go straight if I marry him?" Obippperchum (who knows them both): "Yes; straight to the d-dogs."

JONES (to Specks, who has gone bankrupt): "How are you getting on now?" Specks: "Pretty well. I'm on my legs again." "How! Already?" "Yes; I have been obliged to sell my carriage and horses, and must now walk."

"ARE you aware," said the judge, "that for these repeated breaches of the law it is in my power to sentence you to a term of penal servitude far exceeding your natural life? And, what is more, I feel very much inclined to do it."

OLD GOTROK: "Am I, with all my millions, too old for you?" Miss Mabel: "Oh, no. That would be impossible."

MISS HOMEWOOD: "Charles Brasherton told me that I was looking pretty this morning." Miss Pout Breeze: "That isn't what he told me he said to you." "What did he say?" "He said he told you that you were looking as pretty as ever."

"I HAVE decided," said Maud, thoughtfully, "not to play anything but classical music hereafter." "But a great many people don't enjoy it," replied Mamie. "I know it. But they have to say it's good, because they don't know whether I make mistakes or not."

A HEAVY DAY'S WORK—Husband (returning home to his wife): "What have you done today, my dear?" Wife: "This morning I went out and bought two new dresses." "Yes, and what did you do this afternoon?" "I tried them on." "Oh!"

SHE: "Why, you didn't get a seat at the theatre for my chaperon!" He: "By Jove! I forgot all about it. I'll go back and get it." She (ruefully): "The next seat may be taken when you get there." He: "If you think there's any doubt about it, I'll wait a few hours!"

"WOULD you be willing to live in a haunted house?" inquired Mrs. Meekton, who had been considering the advisability of moving. "Well, Henriette," was the answer, "I must say it would be a good deal of a comfort to be able to hear noises without having to get up and hunt burglars."

MISS COLDEAL: "I should be only too pleased, Mr. Chumpleigh, to go to the theatre, but I promised to spend the evening with Mr. Dasherton. Still, I might arrange to go if—"

CHOLLY Chumpleigh (effusively): "Oh, thank you, Miss Coldeal, thank you!" Miss Coldeal: "If you will give us the tickets."

SIMPSON: "Young Loftus seems to be cutting quite a figure; I wonder where he got his means?" Realize: "Didn't you hear? He got rich by a single literary effort." "Is that so? What was the nature of his composition?"

"A letter of proposal to old Goldbug's daughter."

DAILYWAG: "Did you hear about Gillispoon's being drowned yesterday?" Filkins: "You don't say so! Well, well, that's very queer." Dailywag: "What is?" Filkins: "Why, I've been talking with Gillispoon at the corner for the last ten minutes, and he never said a word about it."

"I'm glad to observe one thing," said the official's close acquaintance. "Your elevation to political honours hasn't made you at all proud."

"I should say it hasn't. A man doesn't know what real humility is until he has got an appointment and had all his intimate friends tell him they don't know how on earth he came to be picked out for so important an office."

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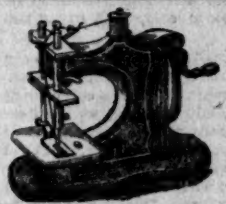
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SOCIETY.

HER ROYAL HIGHNESS THE GRAND DUCHESS OF HESSE has, we understand, been occupied for some days past in working on "Taras," the new art inlay work for amateurs. It is well known that Her Royal Highness takes a keen interest in all amateur art work, and this new branch seems to have attracted her particular attention. "Taras" is a delightfully simple form of marquetry, executed in natural woods. It was first introduced to the public in the December number of *The House* (the artistic monthly for the home), which is published at the office of *The Queen*. This magazine devotes itself to all branches of amateur art, as well as the furnishing, decoration, comfort and management of the home. It has recently added a coloured plate to its many features. The price is sixpence.

The Duke of York is expected in Copenhagen early in April.

At the end of the month the Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha expect to arrive at Clarence House for a stay of some weeks.

It is very likely that the Empress of Russia will go to Livadia for a few weeks about the middle of the month, accompanied by her sister, Princess Louis of Battenberg.

ROMOUR has it that on the return of the Queen from the South, the betrothal of fair and stately Princess Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein to the Grand Duke Alexis Alexandrovitch of Russia—uncle to the Emperor Nicholas—will be announced.

The Grand Duke George of Russia is at La Turbie, near Monaco, where he will stay until the end of May. The Grand Duke is to be conveyed from Baku to Villefranche in one of the Imperial yachts, and he will be joined by his mother the Empress Dowager after her visit to Copenhagen.

At the Austrian Court it is contrary to custom for perishable articles to appear twice on the Imperial table. The result is large perquisites for the attendants. To one man fall all the uncorked bottles, to another the wine left in the glasses, to another the joints, and to another the game or the sweets.

The Queen has arranged to pay a second visit to London after her return from the Continent, so that the season will open with special brilliancy. The Drawing-room to be held in person by the Queen in May is sure to be crowded, and as the Princess of Wales and all her daughters are likely to be present, it is, of course, to be regarded as the first great event of the season.

It is definitely settled that the Prince and Princess of Wales are to represent the Queen at the Coronation of the Queen of the Netherlands, which is to take place about September 3rd at Amsterdam; and there will be a series of festivities, both there and at the Hague, extending over a week. The Court of Berlin will be represented by Prince and Princess Albert of Prussia; and the Grand Duke Sergei and the Grand Duchess Elizabeth are to come from St. Petersburg, the Archduke Frederick and the Archduchess Isabella from Vienna, the Prince and Princess of Naples from Italy, and the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Denmark from Copenhagen. The Prince of Wales will go to The Hague after his visit to Homburg, and the Princess is to go there from Copenhagen.

The equestrian picture of the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Connaught, by M. Detaille, has been hung in the private apartments at Windsor Castle. There was no room for this large picture either in the corridor or in the three drawing-rooms, so the Queen decided to have it placed in the dining-room, which is at the north-east corner of the Castle, en suite with the White, Green, and Red drawing-rooms, all of which look out over the East Terrace and garden. Hitherto no pictures have been hung in the dining-room, which contains the famous punch-bowl and ladle which Randall & Bridge made for George IV. at a cost of ten thousand guineas, and which stand on a malachite pedestal presented to the Queen by the Emperor Nicholas I.

STATISTICS.

In a cubic foot of phosphorescent sea-water there have been found 25,000 living creatures.

BRANDY contains more alcohol than any other spirits or wine—namely, 54 per cent.

THERE are three times as many muscles in the tail of the cat as there are in the human hands and wrists.

In proportion to its population, the United Kingdom has a greater number of women workers than any country, and among them no fewer than 618,000 are set down as dressmakers.

STATISTICIANS claim that the earth will not support more than 5,994,000,000 people. At the present rate of increase the utmost limit will be reached in the year 2072.

THE average speed of a carrier pigeon in calm weather is 1,210 yards a minute. With a strong wind in the direction of flight, some pigeons have covered 1,080 yards a minute.

GEMS.

It is only by perfect freedom of debate that we can hope to arrive at the truth.

It is hard to perorate and act a part long, for where truth is not at the bottom, nature will always be endeavouring to return and will peep out and betray herself one time or other.

THE doors of your soul are open on others and theirs on you. Simply to be in this world, whatever you are, is to exert an influence, an influence compared with which mere language and persuasion are feeble.

HEALTH is the perfect balance between our organism, with all its component parts, and the outer world. It serves us especially for acquiring a knowledge of that world. Organic disturbance obliges us to set up a fresh and more spiritual equilibrium to withdraw within the soul.

THE mastery of self is the end of true living, and this mastery is shown, not in the negative attitude, by the things we do not do, but by that mental power that compels the mind to the positive attitude—the forcing of the mind to do that against which it rebels.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

MILK TOAST.—Cut a thin slice of bread, pare off the crust, and toast carefully to a golden brown colour, and butter it while hot. Have ready a teacup of boiled milk, very slightly thickened with flour (a teaspoonful to a pint); salt to taste.

A DELICIOUS BROWN BREAD.—One cup each of graham flour, yellow cornmeal, and white flour; half a cupful of treacle, one cup of milk, a pinch of salt and a teaspoonful of baking soda dissolved in the milk. Mix the flour, stir in the treacle, then the milk and soda. Steam three hours.

CHOCOLATE BLANG MANG.—One quart of milk, half a box of gelatine soaked in one cup of water; four tablespoonfuls of grated chocolate, rubbed smooth in a little milk; three eggs, extract of vanilla to taste. Heat milk until boiling, then add other ingredients and boil five minutes. Pour into mould. Serve cold, with sugar and cream or custard.

DROP GINGER CAKES.—Put in a bowl half a cup of brown sugar, half a cup treacle, half a cup of butter, then pour over them half a cup of boiling water; stir well; add one egg, well-beaten, half a teaspoonful of soda, one tablespoonful each of ginger and cinnamon, half a teaspoonful of ground cloves, two and a half cups of flour. Stir all together, and drop with a spoon on buttered tins; bake in a quick oven, taking care not to burn them.

MISCELLANEOUS.

BLUE BUTTER is made from the milk supplied by the native cow of India.

EACH figure in a first-class waxwork exhibition has to be remade every four or five years. The wax loses its colour, and becomes soft and spongy after that time.

A FRENCH authority on the venoms of insects and reptiles has established the fact that the poison of the hornet in sufficient quantity renders one safe from that of the viper.

CHINESE brides, when putting on their bridal garments, stand in round, shallow baskets during their lengthy toilet. This is supposed to ensure them placid and well-rounded lives in their new homes.

A GERMAN firm, it is reported, has placed upon the market samples of pure Ingotina, derived from coal-tar, which promises to supplant the vegetable indigo, as other dyes have been supplanted from the same source.

ON a parade-ground at Calcutta are several adjutants or argalas. These birds, which belong to the stork tribe, walk up and down the ground, and they look so much like soldiers that at a distance strangers often mistake them for grenadiers.

A BEAUTIFUL cave discovered at West Virginia years ago has just been explored. The cave is said to contain many large rooms, which glisten with stalactites. The cave is of limestone formation, and is said to be one of the largest, if not the largest, in America.

A PLAN for rendering paper as tough as wood or leather has been recently introduced on the Continent. It consists of mixing chloride of zinc with the pulp in the course of manufacture. It has been found that the greater the degree of concentration of the zinc solution the greater will be the toughness of the paper.

THE only soap which the Hindoos of the orthodox type employ is made entirely of vegetable products. But soap is little used in India, being almost an unknown luxury—with the natives. Among every hundred inhabitants of the country less than a shilling's worth of soap is used in the course of a whole year.

THE highest observatory in the world is that which has been erected by a number of wealthy men interested in science on Mont Blanc, at a height of 15,780 feet above the level of the sea. Since it was not possible to reach solid rock for the foundations, the house was built in the frozen snow.

A FRENCH pharmacist has invented a process by which he says he can form from the leaves of various fruit-bearing trees and shrubs the flavours that are characteristic of the fruits themselves. From apple-tree leaves, crushed and fermented, he obtains a liquid possessing the fragrance and taste of apples, and from vine leaves a beverage resembling wine. His theory is that the peculiar flavour of apples, pears, grapes and berries is prepared in and derived from the leaves of the plant.

THERE has been for many years more or less speculation as to the cause of hot water lakes. The most plausible theory is that by some subterranean channel or passage they connect with volcanic heat and fill with hot water, on the principle of the range boiler. This may be the cause of the Gulf stream. Somewhere, far below the surface of the water, there is an inlet, where a tremendous volume of water sweeps close into the home of the great subterranean fires. A portion of the water is changed to steam. Some of it may be thrown out by the eruption of the volcano but an immense current sweeps up to the surface, of the earth again, and pours upon the coast a perpetual stream of warm water. It would be an engaging study to follow the course of the Gulf stream and discover, if possible, from what depth it proceeds, and by what fire the heat is kept up. There are few more interesting phenomena than the Gulf stream. Scientists have speculated and geographers have wondered at it ever since its existence was discovered.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ALICE.—You must complete the contract.
ALICE.—We do not give such computations.
QUEST.—October 8th, 1868, tell on Thursday.
DOUBTFUL.—You have been correctly informed.
A. B.—There is no public institution of the sort.
B. B.—A little resin added would answer better.
EMMA.—Rub with common salt to remove egg stains.
ANNA.—It could not be thoroughly done in the time.
B. F.—The United States have by far the greater number.
A. B.—Look in the London directory; addresses are never given.
RHODA.—Soap and warm water used vigorously with a nail-brush.
OLD READER.—It is a weekly tenancy, and a week's notice is sufficient.
M. B.—Proceedings could be taken, but we cannot answer for the result.
PURPLED ONE.—Far too long a matter to be dealt with here; consult a solicitor.
MALCOLM.—The father of an illegitimate child has no legal right to its custody.
K. G.—By passing the examination for the particular branch he wishes to enter.
ANXIOUS.—We cannot undertake to answer questions except through our columns.
R. S.—Only a constable holding a search warrant is entitled to inspect the girl's boxes.
HEAVY.—A domestic servant can give a month's notice at any time to leave her situation.
EXPERIENCED.—If you advertise for accommodation of this kind you will have plenty of offers.
S. O.—We should advise you to get Brunswick green; you can buy it as cheap as you can make it.
INQUIRE.—Liverpool-street, London, is now the largest covered railway station in this country.
OLD SUNDRIER.—The first step is to engage a solicitor to make application through a barrister.
LAGER.—King is the most ancient of titles. It or its equivalent is found in every known language.
E. K.—Get a little oil of bergamot from the chemist and mix with the perfume; latter should be pure.
ANXIOUS MOTHER.—You are not bound to pay for the street lamp accidentally broken by your little boy.
THOUGHTFUL.—You had better have some one to see it; cannot say what it requires without an inspection.
A. O.—A special marriage license is granted only by the archbishop of the province, and costs about £90.
MARK.—Stewards on board ships are appointed by the owners generally, but sometimes by the captain.
A. K.—No length of absence of either husband or wife authorises a second marriage unless a divorce is granted.
EDGAR.—A doctor who knows his business should be able to tell you just what would be the best for certain occasions.
KATIE.—Clean six parsnips and steam. When nearly done cool somewhat; peel; slice in long, flat slices, and fry in butter.
ANXIOUS.—A deserter from the Army or Royal Navy may be arrested at any time, and irrespective of the lapse of years.
WORRIED MOTHER.—By all means have the lad examined by a doctor in order that the real cause may be ascertained.
RHODA.—There is hardly any way of carving this except by sawing a small wedge and a portion of the fat to each person.
IGNORANT.—We think you cannot be far wrong in addressing them by their proper titles—to do so does not seem to us at all out of place.
INTERESTED.—Vegetables which have suffered physical injury are said to be thrown into a state of fever, showing a distinct rise and fall of temperature.
P. S.—Most insurance companies insert a clause in their policies to the effect that the sum assured for is not payable if the individual takes away his own life.
S. V.—Briar-root, the familiar material from which pipes are made, has nothing to do with briar. The name is a corruption of "bruyere-root," and the wood is from the roots and stems of a large shrub.
CONSENT READER.—A special marriage license costs about £90. In the case of marriage by banns, proclamation must be made in each party's parish of residence.
INDIGNANT.—It would be impossible for you to prove that injury resulted from what the chemist did, except the doctor swore to it in court, which he would not do; give up thought of suing.
REAR.—Clean the skin first of all with soap and water, or water containing a little liquid ammonia; then dip a bit of red flannel in warm water, and rub the part until the colour is restored.

MAISIE.—There is nothing wrong in your holding a correspondence, providing your letters are always such that your mother could read those you send and those you receive.
ELISE.—Mix pipeclay with water to the consistence of cream and apply it to the spot. Let it remain till the following day, then remove with knife or brush, and stain should have disappeared.
GERARD.—There is, strictly speaking, no salary attached to the position of Prime Minister, but the latter always holds some office with a salary of £2,000 per annum.
STUDENT.—The grammar of French can readily be learned without the aid of a master, but not the pronunciation. Join a French class; there are several in the Metropolis.
PURPLED.—Real estate is land and house property, roughly speaking, everything else being personal estate. The "residue" is the portion not disposed of by any express provision of the will.
R. S.—If you mean sheep skins, wash them like blankets, in hot water with plenty of soap, squeeze out water, shake and hang up to dry, combing the wool as drying proceeds.
QUEST.—There is a society called the White Rose League which meets in London, but has no local habitation, as far as we know, nor do we think there is any branch in Scotland.
DAVE.—You will not find King David's mother named anywhere in the Bible, but by comparison of first Chronicles, 2nd and 10th, and 2nd Samuel 17th and 25th, it is supposed to have been Nahash.

INSECURITY.

EVERY prop on which I lean,
 Every earthly prop, I mean,
 Of whose power I chance to boast,
 Falls me when I need it most.

Lover, brother, sister, friend,
 On whose goodness I depend,
 Whose very presence gives
 Strength by which my spirit lives.

Fall away by some mischance,
 Death, or other circumstance,
 And I find myself indeed
 Languishing on a broken reed.

When these earthly fetters part,
 All these clasps around my heart
 Fall away, and I am left
 Of life's sweetest joys bereft.

To what depths of woe I drop,
 Seeking vainly for some prop,
 All-sufficient to sustain
 One in loneliness and pain.

Like a drowning man I reach
 Upward, and for aid beseech:
 "Help me, Lord!" I cry, and stand
 Well-supported by His hand.

Through the desert, through the tide,
 He has promised to abide
 Ever near; wherever I be,
 Whispers gently, "Lean on me."

Earthly ties how insecure!
 Heavenly ties alone endure;
 And thy idols all were slain
 That I might this knowledge gain!

PERPLEXED.—Of course you would have no right to communicate the secret which your friend confided to you. The fact that he did not caution you against betraying it does not make any difference.

KATHLEEN.—The proper course is for the gentleman to place himself in communication with your father. Should he refuse to do so, break off the correspondence, and acquaint your father with the circumstances.

G. P.—We have known very much what you describe brightened up, first washing well to remove the greasy influence of smoke, &c., and, when dry, apply copal varnish with a brush in a warm room.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—After the lapse of seven years, should she have married again, and the truant husband turn up, she could not be prosecuted for bigamy. The second marriage, however, would be illegal—in fact, be no marriage at all.

D. F.—Sterling is a term used to denote purity, or that which is up to the full standard of merit. As applied to money, sterling indicates the standard of the lawful money of England, which is approximately pure.

EMMA.—Core and stew five large apples until the skins come off easily. Pip, wash, and quarter ten dates. As each apple is peeled, dip it into clarified butter, cover with caster sugar, and fill each apple with dates. Bake in a slow oven until they sparkle.

EDITH.—First wash and wipe the fruit, then grate the outer rind, being careful to avoid cutting into the bitter white layer. Cut the lemons and extract the juice, removing the seeds. Place the grated peel in a wide-mouthed bottle, cover thickly with sugar, add the lemon juice, and keep the bottle tightly closed.

NOSE

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F **THE LOST CHORD.**

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